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RICHARD HENRY SAVAGE



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The Hacienda On the Hill

A Novel

BY

RICHARD HENRY SAVAGE

Author of

"MY OFFICIAL WIFE," "AN EXILE FROM LONDON," ETC., ETC.

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METCALFE & Co., PRINTERS,
3, 4, & 5, GROCERS' HALL COURT, POULTRY, AND AT
69, ALDERSGATE STREET, E.C.

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THE HACIENDA ON THE HILL

BOOK I

FOR HER INHERITANCE

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INTRODUCTION.

The theatric war with Spain brought about no more difficult problem than the occupation of maddened Havana, with its 28,000 still undefeated Spanish troops and its fringing cloud of Cuban irregulars, whose futile bushwacking efforts were supplemented by the men who died at El Caney and served Schley's guns! The peace protocol, useless until availed of, enabled the United States to send "a military organization" to at once take charge of Havana Provinces. This organization of 9 officers and 233 men—the so-called "Butcher Battalion," was commanded by Major Richard Henry Savage, Second U. S. Volunteer Engineers, who just thirty years before had been the confidential aide-de-camp and staff engineer officer of the heroic General Geo. H. Thomas.

On November 21, 1898, one month and nine days before the date of the legal surrender of Havana, this "color" battalion of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois Volunteer Engineers was sent by the President, the Secretary of War, General Miles, and General Corbin under orders "to report to Major-General F. V. Greene at Havana for duty." This battalion laid under the shotted guns of Morro Castle on November 26, 1898, and occupied the Marianao hill on the evening of the same day (alone)

until, some weeks later, the Seventh Corps came to reinforce it.

The arrival of the first armed landing party was dramatic! At three a.m., November 26, the steamer "Florida" ceased under the walls of Morro Castle its bee-line course from Port Tampa and Dry Tortugas. The battalion commander, roused by the steamer captain, gave orders that the steamer should lie off and on until daybreak. There was the grim red eye of the Morro light, still glaring defiance, as on the day when the castle sent a huge shell ripping through the "Wilmington," six miles out at sea.

The laconic orders of the War Department specified no details as to the landing. Havana was excited to a frenzy, and no one knew how long Castellanos's feeble hand could restrain any mob. The lonely commander roused his officers and men, breakfast was hastily dispatched, the men took arms, filled their belts with the ugly Krag-Jorgensen cartridges, and, as the day broke grandly in red and gold behind Cabañas and Morro, a little pilot boat, No. 1, was seen stealing out. Hundreds of soldiers lined the castle ramparts, while the flag of Spain flapped defiantly.

In the dreaming city, whose blinking lights now went slowly out, no one was aware of the coming of the hated Yankees. Major Savage and Lieut. Fitzgerald personally unfurled the War Department colors, the United States flag and the crimson banner of the Engineers with its silver castle.

Slowly the royal ensign came down on old Morro,

being dipped three times, which salute was returned by the "Florida's" ensign. A few whispered words, and, with the pilot in charge, the "Florida" turned west, racing on by the great Santa Lucia water batteries. Now dozens of horsemen could be seen scurrying along the varied shores. In an hour the "Florida" dropped her anchor off La Playa, the only landing for the triune city of Marianao, Quemados and Lissa.

A great ferryboat swung out eight hundred yards from the shore. The men, in heavy marching order (four companies), with the major at their head, sword in hand, poured off the boat at the rickety landing where two thousand riff-raff had gathered. Major Savage grasped the hand of the gallant and accomplished Major-General Francis Vinton Greene, the first man in waiting at the strand. Then, with colors proudly displayed and bayonets fixed, the little column of fours swiftly covered the league between the shore and Marianao Hill.

On, in the sweltering sun, past graveyards and grim redoubts, through lines of blockhouses, the Western boys marched with their long, swinging stride. To the west, in the rolling country, the saucy outpost flags of eight thousand Cubans mocked the banners of the twenty-one thousand intrenched Spaniards, within whose lines the pioneer battalion passed, while the hills rang with warning bugles. Before noon the crest of Marianao hill was held by forty sentinels with loaded guns. And by night the first white city in Havana Province gleamed out! The unerring sagacity of General Greene had provided a little train of flat cars. By night the reserve

ammunition and ration boxes, well disposed, made a place of refuge in case of any sudden attack! On the summit of the hill, where our infantry fire would reach the redoubts and barracks of the Spaniards, in reverse, floated the first United States flag raised by American troops in Havana or Havana Province. An abandoned yacht mast had been quickly called into requisition. How torturing were the perils of that first night! Shoals of slatternly Cuban irregulars were sternly kept out of the lines, hundreds of the people of Havana had driven out to see the huge "Americanos" of the Mississippi valley! Dozens of Spanish officers of high rank were singly escorted across the lines by sentinels to interview the Yankee Commandante. The evening fell in the hush of suspense. Before the major's tent a single brass battle lantern was a signal to the guard that all was well. The four companies slept on their arms that night. To the lonely officer, facing alone the color line, it was a time of honorable trial. With bated breath, a Spanish officer of the highest rank had stolen in to say that he "feared he could not restrain his men from coming up the hill!"

"I can," said the commander, "for we will pile up a wall of your Spanish dead around us! And my country will send a hundred thousand men to find our bodies!"

The long night wore away in a vague unrest. Day broke to find thousands of the curious pressing around the Yankee lines, while the tired-out commander, who had watched, sword in hand, in the night, snatched a few winks of welcome sleep. The situation was a

thrilling one. A single accidental shot, a drunken man's babble, or the petulant frenzy of some fiery Cuban or undefeated Spaniard, would have brought on a massacre. The sternest martial law was proclaimed by General Greene, not an officer or man being allowed to leave the lines. In a week the tension was relaxed. The battalion quartermaster, pistol in hand, arriving on a direct freight steamer four days later, piloted the train of forty wagons through the excited Havana mob to the beautiful suburb where the color battalion of the Second Engineers represented all the majesty of the United States. The cable had flashed news to Washington which made officials breathe freer, and the thirty regiments of the Seventh Corps began their onward journey.

The men and officers of the Second Engineers for twenty-nine days repressed the absurd pretensions of the bombastic and untrustworthy Cubans, as well as the natural ire of the starving and undefeated Spaniards. Gallant and unrewarded Western boys of the color battalion! They shared their rations and pocket money with the sorrowing Spaniards, who began to melt away, homeward, in the silence of defeat. Not a breach of duty marred the lonely occupation by the First Battalion. They kept their country's honor unstained! And when, twelve days after their arrival the Spanish commander surrendered the triune city to a guard of forty men, who held the Lissa bridge—the gateway to Havana—the work was easy for those who came later. For, following on after this little band, within

three weeks, the colors of a dozen Yankee regiments shone in the Cuban sun, and thousands of brave men uncovered as the evening strains of the "Star-spangled Banner" sounded on the air of *Cuba libre*. The work was easy now, and the color battalion had made the way smooth for the whole Seventh Corps.

The first armed march of United States troops in Havana was the march of this command. They hoisted the first United States flag after 402 years of Spanish supremacy. The battalion received, on December 10, 1898, the surrender of the city of Marianao from Don Manuel de Ciria, Marquis de Cervera, and it also carried the only United States engineer flag taken to Cuba which ever flew before the Spanish soldiers in arms. The still unexplained "Story of the Maine" is told in these brilliant pages by the officer who, sword in hand, led his men, at the surrender of Havana, on January 1, 1899, where twenty thousand men had comfortably arrived later to make good the difficult and perilous work of the pioneer organization in the dangerous occupation of Cuba!

The Hacienda on the Hill.

BOOK I.

FOR HER INHERITANCE.

CHAPTER I.

LOVE À LA MODE DE HAVANA.

The sheeted rain which had hidden the stony *mésas* and the palm-fringed savannah, ceased at last. Golden sun lances pierced the overhanging leaden mist, and as Señora Juana Agramonte moved sulkily to the window, the full glory of a Cuban sunset gilded the far blue mountains fencing off the narrow bight beyond Guana-jay.

The still beautiful Gulnare, who ruled over Hacienda la Sevilla, cast an anxious glance westward to where the grim trocha divided the insurgents of Pinar del Rio from the starving "reconcentrados" hovering near her, under the shadows of grim Butcher Weyler's blockhouses.

"*Séa por Dios!* He comes not! May the blessed Virgin guard him if they have sent him to the front!"

the anxious woman panted, with a frightened glance at the rolling tablelands stretched out to the blue sea.

In these feverish days of May, 'ninety-seven, the baffled Spaniards were huddled within their fortified lines, while that black Marshal Ney, the defiant Maceo, romped victoriously over the hills of Pinar del Rio.

As the Angelus solemnly sounded from the tower of the old church at Marianao, the impatient woman seized a mantilla, and, quickly throwing it over her graceful head, passed out upon the broad piazza.

Shading her eyes with her blue-veined hand, the mistress of the handsomest estate in Havana province gazed eagerly down the road to the northward. She never looked westwardly to where the last rays of the sun shone out on the raw red lines of the redoubts, gleamed upon the sides of the glaring white block-houses, and sparkled upon the thin blue metallic network of the cruel barbed wire abattis.

The rattle of an armored train speeding along westward shook her breast with new alarms for her absent lover. "They will not dare to send Weyler's aide-de-camp out there, to face the merciless Cuban machetes!" she murmured.

With swift strides she measured the length of the grand old mansion!

Crowning a superb hill, with its half-mile avenue of royal palms, La Sevilla grandly overlooked forty thousand acres of the richest land on earth, sweeping far away in an emerald sheen of growing cane to the dim, serrated peaks of the south.

"Fair as the garden of the Lord," she murmured, "it shall, it must, be mine! Oh! God, if Max would only come. If there is another," she mused, sadly, "some slim-waisted young patrician of the Cercle de Havana," and then her face darkened as when the black tornado breaks upon the shadowed seas.

She turned and sprang forward as the crouching tigress leaps, for a martial-looking horseman was now cantering smartly along toward her under the royal palms, planted when her dead husband was a babe.

"He must not see me," she muttered, "waiting for him here, like a peasant girl for her lover," and she fled away in a fond woman's deceit.

In the great drawing-rooms she paused before the nearest mirror. The face which met her gaze was still strangely beautiful.

"No! I am not too old yet," she whispered, speaking softly to herself.

Despite her thirty-five years, there was still the glow of that fatal beauty which had brought proud old Don Romero Agramonte to the twinkling feet of Juana Garcia, the star of Seville, Spain's dancing siren, the idol of the casinos.

Major Max Lowenstein, A. D. C. to His Excellency, Don Valeriano Weyler, Governor-General of Cuba, was in a practical mood as he cast the eye of a connoisseur over the splendid sugar estate unrolled below him. His military *coup d'oeil* swept from the crested villages of Marianao, Quemados, and Lissa far out to the debatable lands where the poor starving villagers were now herded under the Spanish rifles.

"This is worth my while, even with Señora Juana as a fair incumbrance," resolved the German military adventurer, as he tossed the reins to the waiting mozo. "Donnerwetter! There's the child though—I must make sure," the avaricious Teuton grumbled, for in his frugally-inclined German heart, Love and Lucre were now face to face with bayonets fixed.

But he squared his shoulders and marched with stately tread into the great drawing-rooms, where the old majordomo had just brought in the wax candles in the quaint silver-branched sconces.

Juana Agramonte stood there, smiling, with a warning finger on her lip, until the old servidor had glided out. And then, with a glad cry, she threw herself in the soldier's arms. "Dios mio, Max!" she sobbed. "I feared that you were out there—with the troops."

"No such luck, mi querida!" answered Lowenstein, shortly. "You know that I am tied to the old man's side by this cursed gun-selling business. If it were not for you, I would throw it all up and go home!" He was now keenly watching the effect of his words.

"You would leave me, Max," the ex-dancer cried, her eager arms encircling him in a passionate grasp.

"That all depends on you, Juana," coldly answered the staff officer, leading her to a divan. "Let us dine! I have been in the saddle for hours, inspecting these Catalan cattle. I have something serious to tell you, by and by."

Señora Juana Agramonte essayed, in the hour and a half of the long-drawnout dinner, all the sly arts which

had, in the old days, brought courtly Marshal, haughty Don, and glittering diplomat to their knees before her. The presence of a half-blind old duenna restrained none of her Castilian ardor, and her French of the coulisses was as perfect a safeguard as the officer's guttural imitation of the Parisian accent.

Juana Agramonte felt, in her heart, a chill which she could not explain. All men had heretofore yielded to her while in the flush of her peerless spring loveliness; but, alas! the hot midsummer days were on now! This cold, blue-eyed German, with the heavy martial features, was as stolid and insensible as the leaden statue of Carlos V. in the Prado.

Madame Agramonte was not of a literary turn of mind, and was ignorant of Byron's satirical remarks about woman first loving the lover, and then love itself, when custom had given it a property of easiness.

Sole mistress of her own actions, she had always faced, without a blush, the memories of Lowenstein's almost unopposed conquest. Here, in La Sevilla, she was queen of the realm, and when she had liberally paid Butcher Weyler for a due measure of military protection, she was reasonably safe.

Juana Garcia had indulged in no illusions when, fifteen years before she had given her bejeweled hand to the snowy-haired old planter who showered diamonds upon her.

Love! A thing for the sport of callow boys and brain-sick girls! The heart—an organ of purely mechanical value in her own sleek anatomy. This was

her cold creed. And she had lived up to it, until trapped by her own passions.

The young gallants of Seville had laughed derisively at the fiery wooing of the millionaire Cuban widower, whose visit to Spain was ostensibly to place his only child, a prattling girl of three, in the experienced hands of his sister in Madrid.

But Don Enrique de Guzman, who dared to try to revive some old-time recollections in the fair Juana's mobile heart, even during the honeymoon, pitched forward, falling stone dead after five minutes' feeble sword play. The fierce Cuban planter had been the deadliest sword in Havana in his younger days.

Stern old Agramonte quickly bore the beauteous balerina far away from the scene of her maddest triumphs. Though her daily life was a dream of luxury, Juana Garcia, the saucy queen of beauty, soon paled into the white-faced Juana Agramonte, a virtual prisoner in her gilded cage at La Sevilla.

Her lord and master was draconian in his severity, and often, in the long years of her marriage, she had gazed out over this same smiling paradise of La Sevilla through eyes blinded with hopeless tears.

Every one of the two thousand dwellers on the broad domain feared Don Romero, and yet served him with the dumb fidelity of the whipped spaniel.

The passive, inert, housewomen, with lurking coal-black eyes, watched her every movement. The village priest was stricken in years, and the ex-dancer knew but too well why none of the great families ever called at

the splendid white marble mansion crowning the lordly hill.

They were all blue-blooded aristocrats, these haughty "peninsulares," allied to proud old historic families; and all Havana province sternly resented the introduction of a light o' love ballerina into their stately functions.

One essay sufficed the embittered Don Romero. When his ravishingly beautiful second wife sat through a whole evening at the governor-general's annual ball to the "gente fina," he ceased to battle with the Cuban Mrs. Grundy.

Only from her opera box at the Tacon, did Juana Agramonte, with a princess's ransom in jewels as a setting, shine out as a baleful Venus upon the wild-hearted young gallants below her.

Husband and wife soon led separate existences, and yet the cold-hearted old intellectual voluptuary asked nothing more than his bare rights of possession.

These he enforced with a relentless cruelty, on guard against all mankind.

When death had at last claimed her aged spouse, Juana Agramonte's fiery heart leaped up in a mad, secret joy. She saw him carried away to the Campo Santo without one tear of sorrow, a single sigh of regret.

A fierce delight filled her—place, power, pleasure, and a golden future loomed up. Shrouded at home in black, she secretly joyed to see the long cavalcade of men bear away forever the cold form of the man who had been a remorseless tyrant from the first.

A child of the gutters—left a manorial princess alone

in the world—she had now neither friend nor adviser, and so she nursed alone her bright illusions, until the Señor Abogado, the family lawyer, called, a month after her husband's demise, to enlighten her upon the peculiarities of the Spanish laws of succession.

At bay, like a baffled tigress, she held her peace until a man of affairs from Madrid arrived later, armed with powers from a new tyrant—the aged sister of the dead man.

But, with feline adroitness, she held her peace and bided her time. The five years between her husband's death and the coming of this high-born German Prince Charming had been filled up with hidden leaves in the book of her life which, she fancied, were all now turned down forever. Her past amourettes were all forgotten in the wild sweep of the passion which made her the adventurer's secret slave.

When the great white stars trembled far above in the liquid blue, Juana Agramonte led her sullen lover out into the inclosed garden. The huge mansion inclosed a veritable Eve's paradise. On this silent night the splash of the fountain mingled with the shrill chirp of the cicada.

The orange trees mingled their waxen leaves with the broad fronds of the banana; the fragrant tropic vines clung to acacia and rose shrub, and the perfumed spicy breath of the garden stirred her slumbering passions to madness.

In the summer-house they faced each other in silence, the lady of the hacienda and her lover.

"Tell me now—tell me all, Max!" whispered Juana.

Her mind reverted to that unforgotten day, only a twelve-month past, when, leaning from the balcony of her town home, she had first showered roses down upon General Weyler's handsome young aide-de-camp.

The mute messages of these eyes had been the signal for the lighting of love's still unextinguished torch, and, on this night, a passionate woman, whose life had been but one living lie, yearned for the truth. False herself, in every fibre of her nature, she panted to know her guilty lover true.

"I may have to leave Havana soon," slowly said the handsome adventurer. "There are ominous rumors of Weyler's recall. He is the only strong man in the army. I must then go to Germany, and if I go, I may not return," the woman at his side convulsively grasped his arms, "unless—unless," he sullenly added, "you tell me the whole truth."

Then he shivered as her voice rang out, thrilling with vibrant jealousy.

"Your business—your trumped-up business—some flaxen-haired, flat-faced German girl; some *hochwohlgeboren fraülein*. Go! You are lying to me! Tell me the truth! You have sworn to marry me! You, the man whose faith has been the whole world to me!"

The phlegmatic German stolidly lit a *papelito*, while his accuser raged in all the fierceness of her wrath.

"You ask me for the whole truth," he bluntly replied. "I ask you for the same. Why did you not tell me that there was a child; that you are but a tenant here; that

these broad acres are not your own; that you are but here on sufferance."

The ignoble lover fairly trembled as the maddened woman sprang to his side.

"And this is your faith, your loyalty, your honor; you, who have humbled yourself at my feet. Beware! By the God above us! There is death in the air to-night! I am still mistress here, lies or no lies! Where got you this story? Speak, coward, or I will kill myself before you!"

There was the flash of a poniard in the pale moonlight, and the alert athlete struggled long till he had wrenched it from the hands of the woman who felt that the truth was hers at last; that love itself was a lie.

Shamed into unwilling caresses, the adventurer essayed every art to calm the storm which was of his own conjuring. The meanness of his sudden accusation smote him heavily. And, yet, skilled of old in deceit, he wove his own tissue of lies to further enmesh the woman whose head had so often lain upon his breast.

"Listen," he said. "You know that we live here upon a volcano. Two hundred thousand Spaniards have filled yawning graves here since these Cuban madmen first left the canefields and rode out to war, their pathway marked by blazing haciendas. Weyler, himself, is desperate. He is betrayed by his underlings. Spain is bankrupt. Yellow Jack has slain his tens of thousands. One adverse wave of battle may at last roll over our trocha lines. The fleet is but half furnished. The treasury is empty. Intrigue and baseness tie the

hands of the queen regent, the baby king may never wear his crown. Our army is a fever-stricken mob. I can not protect you. I fall with Weyler's fortunes. If he is recalled, then I am a marked man. The assassin's knife, the dungeons of Cabañas, the betrayal to the Cuban bandits, all these are Spanish methods.

"I have a sacred trust to others to discharge—to my chief. If I go, I may not return. My sole fortune is my sword—my noble name—and if you are not mistress here, how could you share my fate?"

"You know that I am poor; your daily life is the golden luxury of a queen. If Weyler falls, I can not linger safely here, and, if you are not the rightful lady of La Sevilla, why join me in a double misery—a poverty which, leaving us helplessly fettered, is only a disgrace before the world. Will you go out into the world with me—over the seas? I swear to you that the whole rotten fabric here may crumble any day."

The sobbing woman raised her head.

"Who poisoned your mind against me?" she faltered.

"It was at the club," the adventurer rejoined. "I overheard two men talking of La Sevilla, of the past, of your dead husband. And old banker Menoz then broke in, 'Rich,' he babbled, 'not an acre is her own. There was an heir. Señora Agramonte has life possession, for residence only. Don Romero left a young daughter somewhere in Spain to whom the whole vast estate will descend on her becoming of age.' One of the speakers demanded, 'What becomes of the orphan's revenues?' and then old Menoz laughed, 'You all know

what Cuba is?' I left them in disgust. Now, what can you say to this?"

The woman at his side pressed her hand upon her heart.

"And this is all?" she gasped. "No more? No slanders; no foul abuse of the woman whom you have sworn to marry. There is no such girl! Let them bring her forward. I am the sole mistress here. Would you have me bear the secrets of my life to the rabble? You find me here—on my throne—and here I will live and die. And, now I ask you, whom do you trust? Your plighted wife, the woman who has given you more than her life, or do you herd with these jackals of the Havana clubs. Your fate is in your own hands. When you leave me to-night, Max, let it be forever, unless you are a man, a soldier, a *caballero*."

Behind the mask of each nature lurked the naked truth, which was veiled, even when the soldier, three hours later, flung himself on his horse and rode slowly down under the long line of palms.

There had been pledges whispered anew; burning words; oaths of fidelity, and vows renewed under the silent midnight stars. Lying eyes and lying lips had answered each other's challenges.

As Max Lowenstein dropped the reins on his horse's neck, he saw himself in the pale moonlight—his real self—the paltry patchwork of lies and shams.

A disgraced offshoot of a German guard regiment, banished for swindling at cards; the secret agent of a low cabal, now busy in peddling the rejected rifles and

obsolete ammunition of a meanly avaricious Kaiser to cruel Spain, loitering on the verge of bankruptcy, ruin, and defeat.

Partner in the robbing of Cuban revenues with the swarm of cormorants hovering around the brutal Weyler, the renegade adventurer knew that he was only a figurehead staff officer; in truth, only the secret collecting agent of that arms-peddling syndicate whose sweep is from Corea to the Philippines, and from Formosa to 'Buenas Ayres.

A human hyena, following for profit the red flag of rapine, wherever blood flows or the standard of revolt is raised. An active agent in enlarging Germany's sphere. A huckster of surplus instruments of scientific human butchery.

"Can I trust her," he growled, as a rustling in the bushes caused him to jerk out his revolver and spur his horse along. He gloomily growled: "I must find out the truth. With the money, yes; without it, she may go to the devil. I will speak to Weyler. Who would know if not he? And yet can I trust him? Yes!" he almost shouted. "If I give him a share of the plunder. He shall be my guide. There is but one true friend in the whole world—gold, good yellow gold."

The stalwart Teuton laughed, wise in his own conceit, as he cantered into Marianao, where a warm welcome awaited him in the café of the Headquarters Hotel.

It was thronged with the Spanish officers, in whose purses jingled the yellow gold which represented two-thirds of the monthly rations of their half-starved com-

panies. The dim streets were crowded with the gaunt peasant lads dragged away from old Spain to die under the machete, in the loathsome grip of yellow jack, or the burning grasp of the calentura.

But, while the mule bells tinkled outside, and the discordant cries of the motley street crowd sounded on the air, there was the clinking of champagne glasses, the gurgling laugh of all-too-facile women, the rattle of the dice box, and the twang of the guitar within.

As Major and A. D. C. Max Lowenstein entered, Pepita, the lustrous-eyed singing girl, threw him a rose from her hair. The victorious young gallant glanced at his own reflection in the mirror. Rosy, vigorous, and glowing, he was well satisfied with his counterfeit presentment.

He felt again the clinging arms of the woman who had pleaded with him under the roses of La Sevilla.

"She loves me, that is enough," he chuckled, "and, if she has the gold, she will serve my turn. But I must find out. Weyler must know the whole history. He has the smug priests, the lying lawyers, the greedy officials, all under his iron hand. Here will be money enough for us both, and once I am master at La Sevilla, Señora Juana shall soon learn to sing another song."

Whereat, being a philosopher, Max Lowenstein twisted his mustache, ordered a bottle of champagne, and drew the flashing-eyed Pepita down upon his knee.

Far above him, on the crested hill of La Sevilla, the great hacienda lay steeped in the drowsy peace of night. The herds were all gathered under the great palm-

thatched shelters; the tired laborers dozed in their hammocks, and only the faintly wafted music floated out from the officers, where the swarthy Spanish sergeants of the plantation guard made merry with the graceful Cuban girls.

In her own realm, the great state apartment, Juana Agramonte sat alone, her beautiful eyes peering out to the west.

Far down below her blazed the red watch fires of the lean alert soldiery who lurked behind those cruel barbed wire lines. Scattered over the rolling savannah were the twinkling lights of the distant pickets.

A dropping shot or a weird, thrilling bugle note alone told of far away alarms, and the distant hail of the sentinels was faintly borne on the murmuring breeze of night.

The lonely woman had followed with her eyes the form of her retreating lover. Her bosom was now filled with new alarms, with a strange unrest; and for all his last protestations, the one who bore the yoke of sin with him was not deceived.

"How much does he really know?" she suddenly asked herself.

The scales had fallen from her eyes. With a contemptuous wave of her hand, she cried:

"It is this he loves—this blood-stained La Sevilla—not me. He would be lord of all this."

And yet the adventurer's words had roused her to action. The departure of the governor-general, the onward sweep of a victorious revolution, the red tide of

war rolling in upon the stately pleasure homes of Marianao and Vedado.

She shuddered as she thought of the fierce-eyed mongrel horsemen; those grim night-riders who left only death and ruin in their track.

"Does Weyler abandon his task?" she mused. "Then all is lost. For his blood-stained, mailed hand has been Spain's heaviest flail."

She gazed out on the fields once tilled by the hosts of slaves, whose crumbled bones had long since mingled with the soil. There, below her, lay the teeming Campo Santo of La Playa, with its ghastly harvest of thousands.

"Poor Cuba," she whispered. "Nothing but blood, the blackened rafters, the devastated fields—a hell upon earth; a paradise with poisoned breath; a death-haunted Eden."

She recalled those joyous wandering days of her youth; the wild shouts of applause; the sea of upturned faces; the soft, star-lit nights of Seville; the pleading voice of the lover beneath her window.

And then came back the death in life of her iron chain of marriage; the long years of slavery; the galling yoke which had bound her to the dead man.

She bounded to her feet as the dawning danger came back to her.

"If he should find that girl, this half-hearted lover? How much does he know? I must think, think!"

The last five years of her life passed in review again before her. There were memories which burned in her

bosom's core. Too well she knew the price paid for her suzerainty. Her face hardened as the pride of life swelled her pulsing veins.

"It is a long road you would travel, Don Maximo, my golden-haired lover. The sister is dead; yes, dead and buried in far-away Madrid. The dead make no sign! And, *la niña*, the child whose eyes would not know Cuba, is safe, safe in the hands of strangers. A stranger in a strange land.

"I must see the old administrador civil. He alone knows the secret of Elisa Alvarado's child. I can stop the old miser's mouth with gold. These babblers at the club! Fools!" she laughed. "Let them find her! There is nothing left of her in Cuba save the baptismal register, 'Mercedes, daughter of Don Romero and Donna Elisa Agramonte.'

"For five long years Pablo Ortiz has carefully kept my secret. It is his own crime, as well as mine. And he shall watch Max for me—watch him till I find him true or false!"

Her eyes softened as she whispered: "If Max is true, my heart will tell me how to reward him. If he is false," she muttered, "he shall die like a dog—if he betrays me—I swear it, by the mother of God!"

And yet, for all her stern resolve, doubt haunted the guilty woman's pillows. For outraged love is always its own avenger. The hard-hearted woman, whose eyes had never softened at the sight of her suitors' anguish, now clasped her hands in agony as the face of Max rose up before her.

The mistress of La Sevilla, sorrow-stricken, recalled the days before the jealous devil had found a hiding place in her bosom, and fought away each maddening doubt—the days when burning passion fed her one dear delusion.

And while she wrestled with the dark spirits hovering over her, the handsome lover, whose bond-slave she had become, revelled out the starry night below there, in Marianao, with that burning-eyed gypsy Pepita in the frenzied dance.

CHAPTER II.

CAPTAIN JOSÉ GOMEZ'S SECRET MISSION.

The rattle of gold had ceased, the click of the castanets was silenced in the deserted café when Max Lowenstein bade the keeper of the posada rouse him at dawn. The clinging lips of Pepita were forgotten, for over his sleeping draught the German systematically built up his plans for the exploitation of Juana Agramonte's loosely-held fortune.

"See that my horse is sent up by your trustiest man, Otero," said Max. "I will take the first military train to Havana."

He burned now to set Butcher Weyler, ever greedy for gold, on the track of the missing heiress.

"I must act at once, before the old scoundrel is recalled," mused Lowenstein. "While he still has power, he may build up my fortunes, and also add to the stolen hoard of three millions in Spanish gold which the brute has ready to ship to Spain. Dare I trust him?"

"Yes, for he fears the arms syndicate. If he were to try to betray them, a German fleet would soon knock old Morro about his ears. And if he betrays me, he shall feel their vengeance. No! He would not dare."

As the innkeeper led the way to the best room reserved for the governor-general's trusted aide, the soldier carelessly questioned:

"Who are the oldest residents here, Otero? I wish to make some researches for the general."

"There's but one man, Señor, who has lasted out the hell on earth of the last twenty years here," said Otero. "You will find old Padre Mateo Ruiz up here at the parish church.

"Man and boy, he has been forty years mumbling mass up there. He knows all the living, and he has buried nearly all our population, save those who have rotted in Cabañas, or been fed to the buzzards."

"So," grumbled Lowenstein, as he disposed himself to rest. "There's an idea. I'll go up in the morning and reconnoitre. There may be some starving sacristan fellow, whom I can easily bribe. As for the priest, I'll wager that he is the best friend of this sly one over there. Women and priests always fight each other's battles. But Weyler can surely reach him, and make the old scarecrow talk. He has a way of his own."

Thus it was that, while the thrilling Spanish bugles were still ringing out their wild reveille, the adventurer, roused for his morning coffee, dispatched his charger, paid his reckoning, and strode swiftly up the deserted street to where the old white church gleamed out on Marianao hill.

The Angelus was musically sounding out from the tower where a sacred image posed high in air, spread out its arms in vainly imploring peace.

A few black-robed women crawled along snail-like to the open door of the church, as Lowenstein reached the crest of the hill.

He gazed upon the shot-scarred outer walls, peered into the dim interior, and then walked around the stronghold of God's mercy, where a dozen times the inhabitants had refuged themselves from the wild insurgent riders.

As he entered, with one sweeping glance of his falcon eyes, he saw fair La Sevilla spread around below him, smiling in its inviting richness. A sudden thought possessed him. He had noted the widespread ruin for twenty miles around, the grim work of a merciless partisan war. Even now, in the far distance, the great columns of rolling smoke told of the blazing cane fields and the devastated haciendas.

"She seems to be a 'persona grata,'" he growled. "Even sword and flame pass by her!

"Then she pays for it, and not alone in Havana. There are the others. I wonder if she deals with both parties. They can all be bought, and a word to Weyler will ruin her. Rebel, insurgent, official, and reconcentrado—all want the red gold. Spanish protection and Cuban honor are both in the market."

The tinkle of the silver bell told of the solemn offices of the mass, as the young man entered the old church. He furtively gazed upon the faded mural decorations, the thinly decorated altars, the poverty-stricken interior.

Here was no pomp of that great church whose history is the record of the world's civilization, only a faithful old man with a single acolyte, ministering to a few grief-stricken widows.

For a few minutes the adventurer studied the face of

the gaunt old man, whose trembling hands were busied at the altar.

"I'll get nothing out of Padre Mateo Ruiz," mused Lowenstein, while he surveyed the strong features of the noble-faced padre. "There is both power and wisdom written there."

The clank of marching men recalled him, and he hastily dropped a p eso in the poor box, passing out into the street, now blazing with the fierce morning sun. A hobbling old sacristan was busied in the antechamber there, and he followed the handsome young stranger into the open air at a signal.

The sight of a Spanish golden Alfonso loosened the old man's tongue, and only the shriek of the locomotive at the station above, caused Lowenstein to break off and stride down the hill with the slashing step of the practiced soldier.

Over his "tabaco," in the three-quarters of an hour run to Havana, the young man digested the sacristan's tale.

"If the Padre and Juana are playing a double game, it's a deep one."

The old man had run down the history of the Agramontes.

"The family is all gone, sir," he sighed. "Yes! It is a noble place, La Sevilla, the only one left near us now. Donna Elisa, an angel, dead and gone, these many years! The old se or lies in the Campo Santo. Se ora Juana might be a heretico as well, for she never comes here. We never go there. Of course, she was

a second wife. They tell strange stories of her early life in Spain. And Padre Mateo is Cuban-born. They like us not.

"There was a child. Ah, señor! but fifteen years ago the blessed innocent was taken away to Spain. Dead? Yes, I fear so, for Padre Mateo has never heard since the old don's death. He was a wild man, but—*viejo cristiano catolico!* All is over now! The estate, pues, señor, I suppose it will surely go to the Crown, when the Señora Juana dies.

"I have heard Señor Pablo Ortiz himself say so to my master many times. He is the Jefe Superior de Administracion Civil, and he knows all the history of these great estates. He has ruled us, yes, with an iron hand, for ten long years."

"Then he is the controlling spirit," murmured the German.

Max Lowenstein did not regret that golden Alfonso, miser at heart though he was, for long before he descended at the estacion under the grim guns of the outer forts, he had noted down in his pocketbook the name of Señor Pablo Ortiz.

With systematic German assiduity, he had reasoned out all the probabilities before he sprang into the victoria and drove down to his bachelor quarters at the Hotel Inglaterra.

"I have it," he resolutely decided. "Either Señora Juana and this Cuban-born priest are secret friends, and he is her 'go-between,' in her dealings for safety with the Cuban chiefs, or else she is linked with this

official Pablo Ortiz, and between them they have smothered the child's interests and are now enjoying the revenues jointly. It may not revert to the Crown, this fair La Sevilla, but go perhaps to the administrador. Who knows?

"The one course would give her secret Cuban protection, and the other, the Crown's despotic privileges. And, perhaps, velvet-eyed devil as she is, she is sly enough to work both these schemes."

It was only after an elaborate toilet militaire and a carefully studied breakfast that the now resplendent aide-de-camp presented himself at the palace of the governor-general. Several plans of action had been adroitly turned over and abandoned one by one.

"I have it," he decided, as he mounted the stairs to the room of the general staff. "If he is in a good humor, I will open the subject; if not, I will sleep over this business."

All doubts vanished, however, when that lithe, glittering-eyed young Spanish gamecock, Captain José Gomez rallied his brother aide upon his late appearance.

"It's all right, old man," he rattled on. "The general has not asked for you. He breakfasted with the latest favorite, Señorita Isabel Fulana, and, in fact, came down here in her coupé."

"The band is playing on the Prado, the ladies are out, the day is not too warm, and the news from the front is good. Let us go and take a turn."

"I have important business, José," laughingly answered the major. "Go and find a señorita by your-

self. They all know the very handsomest man on the staff."

As Lowenstein unbuckled his sword and sent in his name, he muttered :

"If I only dared to trust to her," but he feared the vengeance of his stern master. Though well he knew the reckless young divinity who ruled over Weyler's iron breast, he, too, well knew the cold resentment of that pitiless Spanish heart.

"There's one woman in this deal, that's enough," he murmured. "I will tempt him with the yellow gold. Women we can always get—easily won—but gold is an intermittent blessing."

Lowenstein was a philosopher of the Dresdener Bank school.

Brave as the German spy was, he held his breath as he entered the great hall in the second story of the palace, where Field-Marshal Don Valeriano Weyler was busied, bending over a long map of Cuba, stretched out upon a great table.

He walked to one of the open French windows, and there gazed down upon the motley throng in the street, while the black-whiskered tyrant of Cuba was busied with the movement of multi-colored pin-markers upon that map.

The graceful women strolling below under the lindens gazed up invitingly at the general staff room; the echoes of a distant waltz floated down the Prado, and the nodding palms threw their graceful shade over the broad balcony in front. But one voice was heard in the

long hall as the stern dictator harshly gave out his orders in a raucous voice.

The flying fingers of secretaries followed his imperious words; slim clerks noiselessly slipped along the halls of the vast edifice; the clatter of departing orderlies could be heard below, and the notables of Havana, gathered in the great anteroom, where timidly waiting the great man's nod, while the hot-hearted young aides broke off their tales of love and duel in their staff room, to be sent off with errands foreboding death, prison, or starvation to the helpless islanders.

The German major shivered as he heard the man who held two million lives at his disposal, despatch mandate after mandate. There was not a soul in the great city sweltering on its fetid bay under the grim batteries who did not tremble at the name of the burly butcher whose breast glittered with the blood-bought insignia of Spain.

Every inmate of the long gray palace, whose white facings and cool colonnade invited the wayfarer, started up in terror at the alert step of the thin lipped man of fifty-eight, over whose helmet waved the white plumes of a field-marshal.

Lowenstein vainly tried to avoid hearing the ruthless mandates which came from those fiercely mustached lips on this pleasant afternoon.

The gleam of green on the hills beyond Regla was graceful, the white sails gleamed on the bay, the chorus of the street venders rose cheerfully from below, the blue of hope gleamed down from heaven's vault;

yet still that pitiless voice went on, the draconian dealing out of blood, death, misery, and shame. Weyler was sending out individual orders for the arrest and summary execution of a hundred suspected notables.

The German leaped to his feet as General Weyler's voice sharply recalled him. "And now, major, your report from the lines of Marianao. I intend to make some changes there!"

He was at the dictator's side in a moment. The governor-general was leading the way to his private room when the secretary-in-chief announced a deputation.

"Let those peddlers wait!" harshly replied the regent's headsman, as he closed the door. There was a cloud on the governor-general's face which his associate in infamy could not understand until Weyler broke out in wrath. The storm soon broke out in bitter words.

"They are pressing me from Germany now for the too delayed half-million payments upon the last shipment of arms. You must officially silence them! Write them and tell them that the taxes are not in yet! I have loaned the money as a favor to the Spanish bank for six months. So you must hold them off!"

The crafty German's eyes gleamed with a secret joy. "I was about to ask you a favor, general," he said.

"Anything—anything in reason," roughly interrupted Weyler. "Only use the cable—and,—through your consul-general, too! Then they will believe you."

Lowenstein well knew to whom the ten per cent. bonus would go for the use of the delayed payment on

the sharp-voiced Mausers and the merciless cartridges once destined for French hearts.

"I will do your Excellency's will," he humbly replied, "and at once, before I sleep, making report in the morning."

"Good," grunted Weyler, as he lit a cigar and thought of the little dinner with Señorita Isabel soon to await him. "Now, your military report on Marianao's outer lines!"

When the astute German soldier of fortune had finished his exhaustive technical statement, the dictator smote the table with his fist.

"Just as I had feared! It is this outlying population between the lines of the armies who fetch and carry,—who betray all our detachments,—who baffle us in every way! Now, I have work for you,—secret work! You must know my plans! I have marked off areas around every town and post we hold in Cuba, wide enough to raise plantains, yams, corn, and sweet potatoes enough in three months to keep all these people between the towns alive, if they work!"

"I shall call all the outlying populations in, and push my pickets out to the outer boundaries of each! I'll feed these people, but only for three months.

"If they have then raised a crop they will pull through, if they give themselves up to laziness, then," he fiercely snarled; "let them starve!"

"But, general," ventured Lowenstein, "there will always be daring Cubans sneaking within these lines!"

"I know that," coldly answered the man of blood.

“ For these gentry I have had secret lists prepared with a price on the head of every dangerous man known by name.

“ For the so-called insurgent chiefs there is a regular tariff of rank! Now, I will not weary my troops with hunting these beggars down. It is the sun—the *calentura*—the yellow jack which kills my brave Spaniards.

“ I will have the gold ready, and for each man brought in alive, or his head delivered over to us, the price shall be paid, head for gold! As soon as hunger presses on these fellows they will begin to betray and sell out the most daring!

“ After three months there will be a desert around all my posts! By that time I will have destroyed most of the smaller chiefs, and my *reconcentrados*, these sneaking go-betweens, will be dead or else all powerless to run the lines! They will be too weak to travel very far!”

“ Why?” gloomily asked the major.

“ I know the Cubans! They will not work. They will not plant, but hunger will force them to betray!”

“ But the great Generals, Garcia, Gomez, Maceo?” resolutely queried the German.

“ I may reach two of them through cabals or negotiation!” Weyler dryly answered. “ As to the third—Maceo—I wish only to get him lured within our lines.

“ I am sending Captain José Gomez to New York on a secret mission to effect the preliminaries to trap him. We have friends in their juntas. Once over my trocha, I will have a train load of gold for that half-negro’s

head, and you, major, a practical soldier, here, under my own eye, shall watch the front of Marianao.

"No one but you must know how the blow will be dealt! You shall have my utter confidence! You spoke of going back to Germany. Do you accept my commission? Obey me, and I will make your fortune!"

"Hear me first, your Excellency," gravely replied the adventurer. "I will strike as your right hand for you, if you will only aid me as I wish! I have a secret to unfold to you!"

An hour later, Major Max Lowenstein passed out of the secret cabinet with the light of victory shining in his eyes. "As a colonel, the secret agent of Weyler, in full control of the lines of Marianao, the secret of La Sevilla will soon be mine," he reflected, "for none may dare to withstand me there!"

"And I was wise not to tell him of Señor Pablo Ortiz, the administrator. Let Weyler himself look up the history of the girl! He is a crafty fox. If she lives he can summon her, as a loyal subject of Spain, to return and appear to claim her rights. She would be under his legal control. He can throw the estates finally into our joint possession!"

"And I may later get at old Ortiz."

"If the girl lives she may be marriageable now; the story would make her so. I will deceive Juana! Weyler can hide the child, if he wills, until I am married to her. And then Señora Juana can try her stage steps again!" He laughed merrily.

These visions of budding glory were golden in Low-

enstein's mind as he hastened away to the German Club to send the lying dispatch to those anxious-hearted military creditors in the thrifty Fatherland. His unfolding of the story of La Sevilla's illegal occupancy brought unhappiness, however, to one heart, for La Señorita Isabel Fulana wept tears of jealous rage over a message which delayed the vice-regal lover's coming to that neglected dinner.

The happy Lowenstein was dressing himself for a grand ball at the Cercle de Havana when the splendid equipage of the governor-general left the palace of the bishop of Havana. The fox had awakened!

Lying back in his carriage, pondering over the strange disclosure of his secret agent, General Valeriano Weyler laughed in his sleeve. "A clumsy fool, my German peddler scoundrel!

"How did I ever come to overlook poor old Don Ramon Agramonte's death! I remember him in my earlier service here. Let me see. How shall I get rid of this sharp-eyed fellow, Lowenstein, for a week?

"Ah! a trip forthwith to inspect the fortifications of Santiago; the steamer leaves at daybreak! By the time that he returns I will have bagged both my birds! I will then let him go up there and watch this fiery-hearted ex-dancer. If he tries to meddle later, I will find a way to quiet him. The Bishop's idea is the best one of all. La Sevilla, as a nest of detected conspiracy, of course falls into my hands. If there has been any treasonable communication I will grasp the property and—buy it in through an agent! If not—then," he laughed, "it's all the same. I'll find a way!"

With a sudden return from his official respect for religion shown by his pompous visit to the Bishop, the governor-general drove back to his palace, and, modestly entering a closed coupé, then made the heart of Señorita Isabel Fulana merry at a little supper which amply atoned for the lost dinner which had brought tears to the brightest eyes in all Cuba. The governor-general could unbend himself in a lady's bower!

Pride and happiness filled the heart of Max Lowenstein as he was called away from the murmuring waltzes to his quarters by a fellow aide-de-camp.

"You are to go to Santiago at daybreak, colonel," said his junior, as he saluted and took his leave. "The instructions from His Excellency are under his own seal!"

When the overjoyed Max opened the great envelope the commission of colonel greeted his eyes. "This is the tide of fortune; I can trust him now," he proudly murmured, "for he trusts me!"

With hasty orders to his man, the newly-made colonel began to thread his careful instructions. "Here is a letter, commandante," soberly said his Figaro. "It was brought by a special messenger, and I was to give it to you—instantly!"

With grim self-sufficiency, the soldier of fortune broke the seal of the missive. He well knew the handwriting which had summoned him often to that scented rose garden in La Sevilla, where, under the silver stars, the burning lips of Juana Agramonte had spoken in love's own eloquence.

"*Donnerwetter* ! She is true, after all ! " the egotist muttered, when he dropped the letter. It was a woman's last appeal couched in all the passionate tenderness of despair.

With a just appreciation of all the possibilities of the future, the departing dupe of Weyler saw his valet Pedro clatter away in the early dawn bearing the reply which his mechanically sentimental German nature had evolved to the fond self-surrender of the lady of La Sevilla.

The cool breeze was pleasant on the bay as Lowenstein was rowed out under the still shining stars to the Santiago steamer. He left behind him the sleeping city with its thousands of tired heads resting on the pillows of care.

" It will not be so lonely up there at Marianao," pleasantly thought the young blonde giant as he was received on board with all the honors of his new rank. The official way had been made smooth for him. " There will be Juana. I shall be supreme in the secret command of the lines ; there is always little Pepita, and it will be a bed of roses."

Happy are those who know all in their own conceit ! Many a light heart would be stricken with a sudden chill " if we only knew—if we only knew ! "

But bravely the good ship "*Reina Mercedes* " dashed out on the crisp blue waves, gliding past pleasant Matanzas while the tired aide-de-camp slept.

Not a misgiving disturbed his slumbers, and yet, even while he slept, the bewildered Padre Mateo Ruiz was

awaiting His Lordship, the Bishop of Havana, in the apartment of the bishop's palace, to which he had been conducted by a night journey made in the great prelate's own carriage.

The crowning honor of his life had come upon him, and, as the good man anxiously waited the summons of the spiritual ruler of the "*Siempre fiel Isla de Cuba*," he wondered at the courtesy which had sent the bishop's own secretary to say, in his absence, the orisons of the Church at the lonely altar of Marianao.

It was long after the princely breakfast which followed their meeting, when the Bishop, a man of inscrutable face, dismissed his guest "to take the air" in the hospitable charge of the chancellor of the diocese.

Driving out on the pleasant lines of Vedado, Padre Mateo's wrinkled face assumed a new gravity, for the book of the past had been opened, and there was nothing hidden now from the keen glances of that austere man who wore the episcopal ring.

The sea breeze played with the old man's scanty locks. He gazed sadly on the crowded cities of the dead around him. He murmured a prayer: "If it is God's will, I would sooner be there, under the sod, than do wrong!"

He was sore distraught, yet not afraid, for he had told but truths, and it was family history, not doctrine, which had busied the great prelate and the venerable priest for three long hours.

From a vigil of impatient sighs, Juana Agramonte had awakened in princely La Sevilla to read the words

which brought once more joy to her heart. The loving words which brought back the light to her eyes. "He comes back here—in a week! I must hasten!" she joyously cried, as she bade them order her carriage. "But one lurking danger hovers over me now!" she murmured. "The administrator—he must be told of this gossip in Havana! That girl's name must be buried away from the memory of man! It is his safety—as well as my own!"

Through the streets of Marianao, the carriage bore the happy woman on, until the wondering coachman halted before a splendid house shaded with magnificent palms.

The doors and windows were all closed, and no watchful major domo hastened to welcome the honored guest.

"Sick, my God,—perhaps dead,—and then I never would know!" gasped the excited woman, as she strode up to the main door and let fall the resounding knocker.

It was five minutes before a frightened face appeared behind the swinging portal. The house-steward gravely led Señora Agramonte into the dim drawing-room.

"Tell me,—quickly! Your master?" she cried, grasping his arm convulsively.

"Señor Pablo Ortiz—was arrested—at midnight, and taken away—God knows where—" sobbed the faithful retainer. "You know Cuba!"

CHAPTER III.

THE INTERCEPTED LETTERS. "WE MUST HAVE ARMS!"

For twenty-four hours after the mysterious disappearance of that excellent public functionary, Señor Pablo Ortiz, Señora Juana Agramonte paced her rooms in an agony of despair. Her ablest spies could only tell her that the dwellers in Marianao dreaded to approach the administrador's residence. They read all the signs of a new visitation of Yellow Jack in those closed doors.

But the mistress of La Sevilla alone knew better. A sudden joy leaped into her heart as she received a telegram announcing Colonel Max Lowenstein's safe arrival at far-away Santiago de Cuba.

"Ortiz is deep and crafty," she cried, in the relief of her lover's safety. "Perhaps he has been secretly dealing with the insurgents! If so, he never will reappear!" She shuddered, for she knew how secretly the relentless Spanish butcher could deal the blow.

"And, if he carries to the grave all proof of the existence of Mercedes Agramonte, then I am safe!" The cloud had its silver lining after all.

For, she alone, of all living mortals, knew that her dead husband's sister, the lawyer in Spain, and the family abogado in Cuba had sought the silent shore.

Donna Juana laughed as she recalled the keen craft with which the administrador had concealed even the place of hiding, the identity, and the appearance of the legal heiress of the vast estate.

That hidden knowledge had been his means of blackmailing her, and a most potent one. Half the enormous annual revenues of the estate had gone to Ortiz since their league of crime. It had been her steady nerve, with a last threatening a disclosure to the crown, which kept the villain at bay, with this sum.

"I would lose much, perhaps," she had bravely cried, "but you would lose everything—your place, and, perhaps, your life! For, hark you, sir! Even my discarded lovers would wreak a vengeance on you should anything peculiar happen to me."

And, brave now, when facing danger, the ex-dancer plumed herself before the glass. "Max is now a colonel, he will soon be made chief of the lines here! When he marries me, Ortiz will be forced to be dumb, should he re-appear. Men die so easily by accident; here. And yet, I must lose no time!"

While Donna Juana, writing to her absent lover, was emulating the busy bee, and the delighted Teuton aide-de-camp was poring over the old cohorns and culverins moldering on the walls of the forts of Santiago, that active representative of the queen-regent, Governor-General Valeriano Weyler, was following out the same thrifty maxim, "Time is money."

He smiled affably upon the obsequious crowd two days after the venerable parish priest of Marianao had

been translated to the luxurious hospitalities of his titular lord and bishop. The throng had assembled to note the dictator's progress to the wharf, whence, on his superb steam launch, "La Lucha," he purposed to depart on an inspection of the harbor forts.

Only that energetic young aide, Major José Gomez (elevated one grade by Lowenstein's promotion), was in attendance, when the stiletto-like yacht darted away from the landing amid a storm of cheers, "*Viva Weyler! Viva España! Viva el Rey!*"

"I believe that I have lost no time," growled the field marshal, as he cast his delighted eye over the hundred flags of Spain around him, throwing out their red and yellow gleams from masthead and flagstaff.

"To Atares Castle," he gruffly cried, as he seated himself far in the stern of the splendid dispatch-boat, and lighted a cigar, made only for royal and imperial lips. He was calmly planning a neat little stroke of business.

It had, in fact, been a busy two days.

Only the governor-general of Cuba knew that all the archives of Marianao parish were being deftly copied, in re the family of Agramonte, while the modest rector of the humble parish languished in the hospitable arms of the bishop of Havana.

Certain disclosures "for the good of the crown" had already reached the governor-general's ears, which the reminiscent Padre Ruiz had divulged to the bishop's chancellor over several bottles of that excellent Spanish red wine, which gives color to the cheek and a new light to the flagging soul.

The "annual inspection" of the official accounts of the administrador civil of Marianao was now going on, with both secrecy and celerity, for the entire records had been removed to Havana, and now they were under the guard of a special leporello of that aged but alert military Don Juan, the victorious Weyler.

"The good man will be too tired to undertake it himself," mused Don Valeriano.

"It is a good thing that I have the books," growled Weyler, as he signed for Major Gomez to approach. They were fifty feet from any keenly attuned ear, and alone.

"If Ortiz lies, I can trap him in a moment. And, fool that I was to overlook so long La Sevilla; the bishop tells me it is worth three millions.

"It can be confiscated to the crown, to secure an accounting of the moneys due this young girl. Yes," the dictator frowned, "but if she is produced, the clergy will surely want some. *Valga me Dios!* There is enough for all I will need in this little matter!"

General Weyler noted the young aide, standing at attention, with expectant eyes. "Sit down, señor comandante," he affably purred. "Where did you put the administrador?"

"In the lowest casement of Atares, in the darkest corner. I took him around by the waterworks, blindfolded. He does not even know where he is! He was not driven through Havana, and I had the carriage halted in a cornfield behind the town. The house at Marianao is under the eyes of my spies. Not a soul

can leave it, and only one person has approached—Señora Juana Agramonte, of La Sevilla. She only remained five minutes within the house yesterday.”

“Good!” gruffly answered the chief. “Do you know her?”

“I have never spoken to her in my life, excellency,” answered the young officer. “I was educated in Spain and France, as an absentee, and I never saw Cuba till I joined the army here under your excellency’s eyes.”

“Were you ever in New York?” continued the dictator.

“Never, general. I was taken as a child by my father, General Calixto Gomez, to Barcelona direct, and then returned by Havre to Havana, after an absence of eighteen years.”

“I remember your father, a true friend of Spain,” gravely answered the general. “He left no other family among his former Cuban friends?”

The faint sneer was not lost upon the young man, who reddened even under the Cuban bronze.

“Not a soul, your excellency. I am alone in the world, and my sword is my fortune. The government confiscated all my father’s property before he returned to his allegiance after the ’68 to ’78 madness.”

“I am glad that no one knows you in New York City,” slowly said Weyler, fixing his stern eyes on the young man. “You will go on there to conclude the secret mission which has so well begun with your work at Marianao. In civil clothes, with no family gabbers

to annoy you, no past lovemaking, you can aid me there to make your future fortune and to punish the enemies of Spain."

They had swept down the bight of the bay, leaving the superb panorama of the city and its opposing guardian fortresses behind them.

Swinging in to the south of Regla, above them on the hill frowned the old star fort of Atares Castle, "the invincible," the grim keep whose sole privilege of flying the silken flag of all Spanish forts attested the victory of its defenders over the bulldog English! It was the broad stone of honor of faithful Cuba!

As they neared the landing where the guards of honor were already visible, General Weyler gripped the young man's hand.

"Hark you, young sir!" he harshly cried. "Up there in that ditch—"

"Lopez and the braggart Yankee Crittenden, with fifty others, were fusiladed in 'fifty-one.'

"I'm going to execute all my own Yankee prisoners there. There are yet graves to dig in that old ditch, and if you see anything there to-day, remember that you have very poor eyes. If you ever find a tongue, you may lie with the silent ones there yourself. My business is with the enemies of Spain."

The young officer saluted in silence, and tapped the medals on his breast in a mute protest, as the great prototype of Alva relapsed into a moody silence.

✓ The cloud of buzzards soaring over Atares welcomed their friend, the governor-general, who held Cuba for the boy king.

Above them, as they were whirled up to the proud keep, there was one pair of mournful eyes peering out of a musketry loophole into the gloomy angle of the stone-rivettèd ditch of the fortress.

A man who knew not where he was—a husband, a father, a man of pride and wealth, and finely-drawn blue blood—who heard nothing now but the mournful tolling of the passing bell in the little village below.

Shut off from him was the superb southern sweep of the fringing hills; he could not see the bright blue vault of heaven; he could not note the waving palms; the far-sweeping rich savannah; the noble hills in their semicircle “with scattered cities crowning these,” and in the noisome silence of his dungeon he could only hear the beating of his own heart, and the hoarse half-hour cry of the lazy sentinel upon the mossy walls above him. A dreamy silence of death brooded over the old stronghold.

It was long after luncheon, when the officers had toasted the young boy king for the last time, when General Weyler, wearied out with his inspection of the peerless old stronghold, called the commandant and whispered to him a few meaning words.

“The prisoners and our reserve ammunition stores!”

It was the last military detail.

The stern governor-general was only followed by his watchful aide and the commandant as he carefully inspected the casemates filled with the Mauser cartridges of his secret partners. He smiled a quiet, wolfish smile.

“I wish to see if these are good enough for the Yan-

kee hogs," he placidly observed. "Commandant, send a sergeant's guard down into the ditch. We will take some samples of these cartridges ourselves."

Major José Gomez was paler than even the son of a Cuban apostate general might be as he followed the governor-general down to the angle where the lonely man still peered out into the gloom.

"Are you armed?" demanded Weyler, with a glance at his aide's gilded dress-sword.

The young man tapped the heavy revolver butt hidden under his coat.

"Take the key from the turnkey. Send him away and open this cell. Stand at the door, within call, and out of hearing, mind you!"

In five minutes, there was silence in the long, damp corridor, save the murmur of the two voices echoing in that lonely cell.

The official review of the acts, public and private, of that eminent functionary, Don Pablo Ortiz, lasted for a half an hour. The voice which had been so coldly pitiless in the courts of justice, was now childishly pleading, as the terrified man answered the questions sharply hurled at him by the armed tyrant, whose rude voice carried the cold accent of death in every tone.

"And," said the inquisitor, "you have now told me every fact and detail of the history of Señorita Mercedes Agramonte, the rightful heiress of La Sevilla. You swear on the cross that no one knows where she is but you, and that you have rightly divulged to me now her real place of abode?"

The trembling man fell on his knees.

"Bring writing material. I will certify that Dolores Perez, now at the convent school at Fort Lee, New York, registered as an orphan and as a niece of Felipe Gonzales, of Matanzas, is the child whom you seek. The banker's drafts will prove it. The nuns have my letters and the girl is now nearly nineteen. All the letters, the child's pictures, all are in the strong box buried under my library floor at Marianao."

In fifteen minutes, the humbled official had signed the paper. A gleam of hope shot across his wan face as the governor-general himself witnessed the signature, and then observed, with a mollified smile :

"I shall know to-morrow if this is true, and you will hear from me again."

The iron door had hardly clashed when the dictator took a last glance at the poor wretch, praying there on his knees before an iron crucifix affixed to the wall.

Pale as brave men can whiten, was Major José Gomez, when he heard the harsh order :

"Send the commandante to me, and then go down and take command of the firing party in the ditch below."

The passing bell was still mournfully tolling below them as José Gomez stood at last, sword in hand, before the waiting firing party. He dared not even turn his head as a cringing man was pushed forward into the dark angle, with his hands bound behind his back.

One furtive glance above him told him where unforgiving eyes now watched, wolf-like, from the loop-

hole of the cell, where the governor-general had pursued his crucial inquiry into the whereabouts of the missing heiress of La Sevilla!

"You are to try these cartridges," said the commandant of the fort, as he threw a score on the ground, and then fled away. He escaped one horror of a soldier's life.

Gomez motioned to the stolid-faced Catalan peasants, clad in their sleazy blue jackets. The gleaming-eyed brutes were but too ready to try their new Mausers, and from above a hoarse voice then gave a signal which the affrighted Gomez followed with a wave of his sword.

There was a deafening explosion, a hollow groan, and something prone and shapeless lay there among the rank weeds, as Major Gomez fled like a wraith into the dark gallery.

He stiffened into stone as a stern voice demanded:

"And, the ammunition?"

"It is good," faltered the young aide.

"And you are perfectly sure that you saw nothing?"

"Nothing, excellency," stammered the young man, clutching at his cravat. "I pray you let me retire. The air is close—I faint!"

He fell senseless at the feet of the governor-general as the tyrant passed slowly down the corridor, having first carefully placed the dead official's last writing in an inner pocket of his tunic.

"He knew too much, the señor administrador, far too much," growled the dictator. "And, now, thanks to him, I know a little more than even my good friend—

my good friend—the bishop. Knowledge is a dangerous thing—a very dangerous thing in Cuba.”

It was an hour later when the cool breeze of the bay had revived the young officer, who had been “seized with a sudden vertigo,” that Weyler gravely said:

“You need a rest for a few days, major. I will send a special train out to Marianao to-night. You will publicly introduce Don Pablo Alvarado as the temporary successor of the civil administrador (who has been called away to Spain upon business of the Crown).”

Weyler paused to note the effect of his words.

“Be sure to post all the official placards, which Don Pablo will furnish you, and you will also find and bring to me, sealed, the iron strong-box under the library floor, which contains some of the official papers of this gentleman who has gone to Spain. As to Don Pablo, he will take charge of all else. You, in silence and with no eye for the past, will return to me at the palace. Then you shall go to New York with *carte blanche*, unforgetting your duty. Your life, your honor, your latest sigh, belong to Spain, to Spain alone.”

The shadows of night closed down that evening, hiding alike the merry little dinner party of two at Señorita Isabel Fulana's, and a group of ghouls who heaped earth on a raw, red mound in the ditch of Atares.

Lights twinkled in hut and hull and bower as the night wind stirred the reflections of the twinkling stars in Havana bay, and the prison rat played undisturbed that night in the empty cell in the casemate of the old castle.

On far La Sevilla's crested hill, Juana Agramonte leaned out of her casemate and asked the unpitying stars if her lover would be true for aye.

And, so in fear and trembling, in madness and mirth, night fell on Havana, the hapless Sodom sleeping under a suspended sword. And the day broke to usher in new horrors!

Colonel Max Lowenstein's return a week after General Weyler's "experimental test of the cartridges," found an unusual activity in the governor-general's palace.

The staff waiting-room was denuded of all its brilliant young officers, and the whole circle of Havana's defenses had been rigidly inspected.

The general's brow was gloomy after he received his aide's reports as to the Santiago's defenses.

"I have sent Major Gomez off on special duty, for some time," he said. "You must take up your quarters here at the palace, so that you can be near me night and day. I am throwing out my lines and establishing the zones for the reconcentrados. I will show these insurgent banditti that they have no night-capped grandmother of a Campos to deal with. And, look you, Lowenstein, your German backers have dared to cable on to me for security for the deferred payments on the arms.

"You must cable them in your own cipher. *Sangre de Dios!* If they dare to push me, I will reject the whole consignment as being 'below quality,' disapprove the bills on a secondary inspection, and they can then

look to the home government for pay. You know what that means—five years. They'll not get a peseta out of me. Hasten away and send off these dispatches. Report to me here, when you are moved in. The adjutant will assign you rooms near to mine. Do not leave the palace for an instant, then, without my knowledge. You are to be at my call—day and night."

The startled renegade hastened away to do his master's bidding, and only stole time to pour out his heart in a letter to Señora Juana. He smiled as he added the last clause. "Reply by the bearer—he is trustworthy. I dare not telegraph. I can not come, but tell me all, and hold me in your heart!"

He breathed freer as he heard the horses' hoofs rattle away, and then bent his head over the cipher dispatches which were to save his future fortunes. "*Gott bewahr!*" he groaned. "If this devil enrages himself at me I lose my chance at La Sevilla, at Juana, and the future! They must yield to him! The fools must wait!"

At orderly hour the next morning the dictator showed a smiling face as he read the replies flashed back under the ocean foam.

"You are dismissed till eleven o'clock, when you will ride out with me," said Weyler, "but keep within summoning distance. I have some important papers to look over."

General Weyler sought his private cabinet as the aide left. Once there, he gave himself up to pleasant anticipations.

"This fool has now put off his peddler-masters now for a year. Good. He little knows that his every movement in his rooms is reported! Not the ear of Dionysius, but the devil's eye is the concealed loophole in his chamber. I will soon have his letters to her, and her replies, for the 'mozo' would betray his Maker for a hundred pesos. He is a Cuban-born!"

Unconscious that his valet, horse-boy and orderlies were only the secret spies of his chief, Colonel Lowenstein bent his head over the letter which his returning messenger brought, an hour later, to his new quarters.

He sprang to his feet in a sudden rage as he read the closing lines of the impassioned love story. "A new administrator civil already in possession at Marianao, and the military command has been given to another! Here is some hidden devilment!"

He paced his rooms in a vain rage. Too well he knew that smooth-tongued lady-killer, Colonel Manuel de Herrera, the Marquis de Villar, a Spaniard of the bluest strain and fiercest mood. A man not to be lightly braved!

"This fellow is a pet of Weyler's,—a man far too powerful for me to fight openly! He will soon find the way over to La Sevilla. There will be the little dinners in the pleasure garden; there will be walks under the stars. And I, chained to him here, may lose both the woman and the domain! It is the work of hell itself!"

He saw but one star of hope now gleaming out. "Weyler would never dare to touch me! A German! Never! I must hold her to my heart now, for I depend

on him alone for a share of the future's harvest. I dare not speak to him of this openly.

"If I were only in Germany I could have him threatened by my associates!" But he knew also that the governor-general could delay his passport for a year if he tried to go across the seas. "And besides, he might send me out to Pinar del Rio, to fall under the machetes of Maceo's butchers." He had forfeited German protection when he put on the Spanish uniform. And he was in Weyler's clutches.

He was placid of mien when he rejoined his chief, for he had dispatched his letter burning with a new fidelity. And, after all, the three leagues could be ridden twice a day by his messenger, so that the railroad of love was a short one, and easy of operation.

In the day's outing with his stern chief, he gazed upon the stern countenance of his master with a secret awe. "This man holds Cuba in the hollow of his hand, and he may move me on to higher rank to suit his own designs."

It was true that the general spoke frankly of the new duties soon to fall upon his trusted aide.

"I have raised you to as high a rank as I dare give to a foreigner," he briefly said.

"You know Spanish jealousy. Near my person, I can protect you; in a general's rank I could not! But I shall send you out there on the Marianao front soon as inspector of the lines.

"In that way you will be my personal representative. You will be relieved from your ceaseless watch near me

when Gomez returns. You and he are my right and left hands. The others are men forced on me by rank, blue blood, or court favor. Only danglers on the Prado, in the clubs, or at the feet of some worthless girl! You will receive only my personal orders!"

That night General Weyler laughed heartily over the intercepted letters. He read them in the boudoir of that charming young person, Señorita Isabel Fulana. "They are active correspondents," mused the governor-general. "By tapping this current of love, I can soon find out if Donna Juana has any secret relations with the insurgents, and also what deviltry Lowenstein is up to. He is a likely fellow. I should not like to lose him, but—if I did, there would be one-half saved out of the commission on the arms! And, there are shoals of these long-legged German ritters to replace him! Every man can be replaced in this world!" In his foolish pride, he forgot himself!

"This woman Juana is a deep one. She has avoided the church, it seems. Diablo! A Cuban wife without a confessor! And, so it seems that she has no dealings with the padre! If he is an insurgent sympathizer, then the good bishop will soon trap him! A man of blameless life, adored by all.

"Ah! If I find this wandering young heiress, she may be installed at La Sevilla until I have unraveled the hidden past. It will take some months to follow down the books of the gentleman who has gone to Spain. Convent-bred, she will, of course, be religious. Séa por Dios, and so, through her, the padre can be watched

by the bishop, and the girl 'spiritually directed' by my old friend!

"It would be a glorious victory if I could quietly make La Sevilla mine, 'in due process of law,' and so stop the leak in our lines at Marianao. Someone has long aided the rebels out there with a devilish ingenuity. If I catch them—whether faded priest or stage beauty—they shall 'go back to Spain' by the same road that the administrator found so invitingly open!"

That very night, while Weyler listened to Isabel's guitar—while Donna Juana gloated over her lover's letters—while Lowenstein blocked out his future villainies—old Padre Mateo Ruiz sat in his little arbor under the shadows of the old church at Marianao.

But one feeble taper twinkled on the altar, and he was revolving in his mind the sudden friendship of the bishop of Havana and the suave hospitalities of that week of splendor. Troubled in his mind, he pondered over the sudden departure of the administrador and the abrupt change of commanders at Marianao.

"Do they suspect me?" he timidly asked himself. He sighed as he thought of the steel hand of the church under the velvet glove. The old sacristan interrupted his reverie. "Here is a beggar who demands to see you!"

The priest shuddered as a tall young countryman glided to his side. "My God! why have you come?" faltered the old man.

There was an answering whisper, "I came from Pinar del Rio to give you a letter! I am going back to

New York. I must have your answer. We must have arms, soon, or Cuba Libre goes down in blood and shame!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE OLD PRIEST'S STORY: "YOU BEAR A CUBAN HEART!" "HE IS MY SON!"

Padre Ruiz seized the young man's hand and quickly hurried him through a little door into his own bedroom. There was no light burning in the apartment, but the moonlight streamed in through the iron bars of the long, open windows.

The sacristan followed them silently, for he had noted his master's abject terror. A little oratory opened out of the priest's room, and at this door the Padre paused. "Watch here, Domingo!" he whispered.

Once within the little room, the Padre wheeled aside a moveable altar with its high screen. The little room had no opening save the door through which they had entered. "Follow me; stoop low, my son; Domingo will wheel back the altar."

By a little staircase the two men groped their way up into the half story left over the old one-story masonry rectory, as an air space, to fend off the merciless summer heat.

There was a table and chairs, a couple of rude pallets, and a few utensils scattered around. The priest, with trembling hands, lighted a candle.

"Beware of the light, Padre," whispered the stalwart beggar.

"Ah, my son! The tile roof has been doubled, and this attic sheathed twice inside, to prevent a single ray of light finding its way out. How many friends of Cuba have owed their lives to this friendly shelter! Give me the letter now. I will read it and return. Domingo will bring you food. You have fasted?"

"I have been lying in the ravines along the lines for two days, with only raw plantains and ditch water," answered the young man. "Only when a drunken Spanish sentinel slept could I pass the lines of the blockhouses. But once in Lissa, this morning, I mingled with the children of misery until it would be dark enough to steal in here. I dared have nothing on my person, lest they should search me and find the letter." He fell on his knees before the old man. "I crave your blessing, holy father!"

With a choking voice, the padre blessed him, and stole down the stair.

Left alone, the young man gazed around the loft. He sprang up in alarm, as the singing Spanish bugles wailed out their mighty retreat. There were fifteen thousand troops scattered now in a half moon from La Playa's whitening surf, on, past Lissa's rocky hills, to the three mountains below La Sevilla. From there, a triple barbed-wire entanglement, with a trebly picketed line, ran twenty miles to Sandago.

"Thank God! Here are arms!" he cried, as he grasped a carbine and its cartridge belt. He threw a

loaded revolver on the pallet by the table. "The carbine for the Spaniards," he muttered, "the revolver to save me, at the last, from shame!"

Here, in the loft of Padre Ruiz's rectory, was a goodly store of military furnishings. He started as old Domingo hobbled up the stair bearing a tray laden with simple food.

"I go to bring water and wine," the sacristan said.

In a few moments he returned with a crock of water and a flask of the life-giving juice of the Spanish grape.

Standing silently, the sacristan watched the young man eat like a famished wolf. When the Cuban spy had quenched his thirst, he gazed wonderingly at the old servitor.

"Don't you know me, Domingo?" he queried. "Little Andrés, who served the altar here for two years?"

The sacristan joyously clasped both his hands. "*Valga me Dios!* But, my eyes are almost blinded now. And you have grown, you have changed!"

"Bueno!" proudly answered the young man. "I have changed much in the four years in the American school on the Hudson, but the last three years of war have made a man of me."

It was indeed true. The rags of the beggar could not hide the grace of the sinewy form of the young guerilla.

Tall and lithe, with flashing dark eyes, he was a resolute young David, but his face was sharpened and

hardened with the hideous uncertainties of a war without quarter.

"You are right, señor," answered the sacristan. "Not a Spanish butcher of them all here would ever know Andres Gomez, the little acolyte of Marianao! 'Seven years changes a man,' says the proverb. How did you get here? The roads are drenched with Cuban blood on all sides, and the buzzards have fattened on our bravest."

He held out a bundle of cigars. "You are perfectly safe here." The spy lit a tabaco, and threw himself wearily into a chair.

"Tell me, first," said he. "This room—these arms—the cunning hiding of the entrance by the altar. What does it all mean?"

"Hijo mio," answered the sacristan. "You know there are a hundred of the richest families in Cuba who have their summer homes scattered all along here from Santa Clara to Vedado, to Buena Vista, Marianao, Quemados, and Lissa. Only here can they reach these life-saving breezes on the high ground, alternating day and night, which drive off the malarial vapors and kill the germs of el vomito.

"Now, all these people are forced to bow the knee to Spain. Wretched people! Their lives, their town houses, and their summer houses are all under the control of the governor-general. To them, the Spanish bugle is only the signal of an impending death. All are born insulares. They hate the cormorant 'peninsulares,' the greedy officials, the brutal soldiers, the corrupt officers.

"But these great estates all lie scattered far out, fan-like, far over Havana and Pinar del Rio provinces. And so, these domains are exposed to the vengeance of the insurgents, the pillage of the 'nanigos,' the exaction of every petty bandit, a thief at heart, who robs and murders under the shadow of flagless Cuba Libre!

"These families have one-half their wealth in great town property, securities, and business; the other in these vast sugar and tobacco plantations. Their daughters remain at home in the power of the Spaniard! Their sons have stolen away, like you, to join the patriots in the mountains. On the one side, the Spaniard must be paid; on the other, the outside fortunes must be saved from total wreck, and so tribute is paid to both parties!

"It is here that these patriots at heart meet by stealth; here that they arrange for delivering letters and messages; here, through Padre Mateo, they co-operate with the Revolutionary Junta in New York, in Paris, in Key West, and elsewhere. It is the post of honor of the Cuban cause in the west!"

The young man's eyes kindled. "And you, Domingo, and my dear old master, are the two heroes, standing on the verge of their graves!"

"You are right, señor," simply said Domingo. "But master and I, now only await the call to the Campo Santo. You are a tried soldier, I can see. Yet peace has its dangers as well as war!

"We will fight on here silently for the cause, till help comes from the northern stars over there. As

for our hiding-place, the entrance is covered by the altar. The Blessed Host is always there. And no Spaniard would dare to profane that humble shrine. Now, your own wanderings! Tell me."

The young soldier laughed bitterly. "It's a brief recital. I ran away from the Military Academy at Poughkeepsie with a chum. We acted as messengers and interpreters for a dozen officers who were fitted out by the Junta. From Key West we finally reached Trujillo, Honduras, on a banana steamer. That was three years ago.

"We were landed at last from a hide drogher near Cape San Antonio—just turned adrift in a yawl. From Belondron, we made our way into the mountains and joined Maceo. My poor chum was killed in the very first fight. I was left alone in the world. I dared not try to communicate with Padre Ruiz. I feared to bring a bloody vengeance on him. These three years," the young man murmured, "have passed in a horrid dream. Marching, fighting, sleeping in canebrake and swamp, sickening, starving, and living the life of the Cuban soldier.

"Tracked like a wolf, I have threaded the wilds of Santa Clara, Puerto Principe, and Santiago. My American education made me useful, my face was unknown, my obscure birth a protection. I have twice been sent back to the United States. I once floated for ten long days in an open boat off the Salt Key banks, till picked up, half crazy, the last survivor.

"I have served with El Chino Gomez, with the great

Garcia, and that stern fighter, Maceo! They have even sent me into Havana city as a spy, and I lived in Matanzas for three months as a muleteer.

"From my last American trip I boldly returned to Havana, three months ago, as a servant to an English tourist, who was going to see a great estate out in Pinar del Rio." The youth groaned as he gravely said: "I went with him to Cabañas and Morro, and I have seen our men shot there like dogs, with their backs turned in shame. I have spared the unarmed prisoner up to this time, but my machete, after this, knows no mercy!

"When I was at last safe at the town of Pinar del Rio, my good English friend sent out an escort with me into the mountains. I delivered the mail which I had brought from New York, and, when I joined General Maceo, I was ordered by him to steal through the lines with these dispatches for Padre Ruiz.

"No one but me, in our little band, knew the ground around Marianao thoroughly. So," he said, with a faint smile, "I was turned loose to get in here, with orders to destroy my dispatches, if run to earth, and to die mutely. Here I am!"

There was the sound of three raps on the wall below. "You are safe here under God's roof," hastily cried the old sacristan, as he hobbled away to resume his watch below.

There was a heavy tread upon the stair, and Padre Ruiz entered the little retreat. His face was very solemn as he said: "Did you know the contents of these letters you brought, my son?"

"Nothing, padre *mio*! Only that they were of life and death importance. I have fulfilled my trust. I lay for a week hidden among the canefields and cattle runs of Palo Alto, a great estate forty miles from here. There the negroes and old women brought me tortillas and meat. Else I had never seen you.

"The Spanish cavalry hunted me like a fox, and I lay in a muddy lagoon, with my head hidden in a bunch of reeds, my body under water, while they watered their horses within ten paces of me. Oh! It was horrible!"

It was midnight before the priest had finished the minute questioning of the happy youth. "It is God's will," he solemnly said, as the bell sounded the passing of another day.

"You are to be the instrument of great things. Tell me, did you see anyone you knew at Palo Alto? It is a grand old estate!"

The young soldier shook his head. "How should I—a homeless wanderer, an orphan, the child of poverty? But for you, I should have died by the roadside, when you took me in, a half-starved, wandering boy. There is a Spanish general now holding high state there. They tell me that it was once the seat of a great Cuban family, and the grave, fire, and sword have swallowed them all up."

The old man's hands were moving in a silent supplication, while his lips murmured a whispered prayer. "And, your orders from General Maceo?"

"Were to obey you; to lay my life down for Cuba at your bidding," answered Andrés.

"Did you—did you tell him, my son, that you knew me?"

"No. I feared, padre mio, to complicate you. No living man or woman has a true friend in Cuba! The lips which kiss to-day, betray to-morrow; the hand which saves the one day, may doom to death the next, or take the Judas gold of a bartered life.

"Whom the Spaniards can not kill, their death is compassed by purchase, with minted gold. Even our own soldiers say that Maceo's head will be sold for its weight in diamonds!" He sighed, as he owned the crowning shame of the half-breed Cuban race.

"You did wisely, my son, you did well. God watch over and guard you. Now, you said you were going back to New York. So you are, but it is I who will send you. Cuba Libre shall be more than a hope—it shall be a blessed truth. The letters which you brought to me indicate the plans, the means of landing the artillery, the dynamite, the rifles, and the ammunition. General Maceo is wise and brave and true.

"As long as he holds the hills of Pinar del Rio, the butcher Weyler will be baffled. But our friends here, of whom Domingo has told you, are gathering up the funds, the bills on London, to pay for the great consignment. You are to rest here for a week in hiding. Then I will send you out by Bahia Honda to New York, disguised as a divinity student. There is another priest over there true to the Lone Star. He will meet us at Guanajay.

"When you are shaved and tonsured, when this dark

chamber has paled your face, and I prepare the disguise, I will go down with you on the train to Guana-jay. Padre Villareal will meet us there, and he will take you in his carriage over the mountains to Bahia Honda. He will get passports to go on to New York with you to report to his religious associates; at the last moment he will be taken ill. You sail alone with his messages."

"But, padre, there are clouds of Spanish soldiers there. The road is lined with the butchers. The train is ironclad!" said the young soldier. "It carries a picked guard of fifty men!"

"I know all, my son," gravely replied the padre. "The Spanish sword hangs over our head, but, aimed at the church, it only uselessly cleaves the viewless air. The church is omnipotent. I shall hide you below, in a secured retreat, while our patriots come to me here with the funds. They will have to pick up drafts on London in moderate sums to avoid governmental suspicion. I have a dozen sets of robes below. Your disguise shall be ready to-morrow, and Domingo will be tailor, barber, valet, and all.

"You must not view the face of anyone of the noble hearts who bring me the funds to purchase these arms. God prosper Maceo! He writes me that with these supplies he can hold out two years."

"I thought that I would go back to the general," murmured the young man. "Ah! It would be unsafe to trust this great fortune to the chances of the prowling Spanish guerillas. Do you see that either I or

Padre Villareal are with you every moment till you are on the high seas, under the British flag, sailing direct for New York City. The funds are all insured, secretly, and if you should die by sea, which God forbid, still, the second drafts would reach New York safely by another messenger. Go now to your prayers, my son. Then to your rest in peace, for either Domingo or I is always awake and on guard. The mighty shield of the Holy Church will shelter your slumbers. Proud, happy, and blessed am I to know that your education (my little offering to your life), has made you a hero in the cause."

The old man rose to go, after lifting his withered hand in a fond benediction.

"Stay, father," earnestly cried Andrés, springing to his side. "In all these seven years, I have waited to ask you one question—am I only a waif, an outcast, a bastard-born? Even ever so humble, why have you never spoken of my father and mother?"

"In the camp I have turned away in silence when asked of my parentage, my past. At school, my merciless Cuban companions jeered me in the days when I battled to resent their insults. I am a soldier now; I will soon have a rank, I am told; Maceo said, 'Be successful, live to come back, be true, and I shall give you a captain's double stars!' I ask you, as a gentleman, a *caballero*, do you know anything of my birth?"

The young man's voice trembled in its fond entreaty. With a solemn gesture the padre turned. There were

tears in his eyes, as he faltered: "Ask me not. I can not lie. I must not speak. Your life is young. Shadows fall soon enough on us!"

"Listen!" proudly cried Andrés, with flashing eyes. "I stand before you in beggar's rags. I have often gone on in front of blue-blooded caballeros on the field. I have faced death a thousand times. I go to face it again. You know that Spanish spies swarm everywhere. I know that they do in New York City, on ship, on train, and at Key West, even. They are within our closest lines. I left you a raw boy of fifteen—I come back a man of twenty-two, for three years a veteran. I fear nothing. Do not let me die with the truth locked in your heart. God might call you home any day. And, then?"

The priest sank into a chair. "It is the will of God that I should speak," he muttered. "You are brave, my dear boy, you are strong in truth and honor. Maceo writes me what you have been to him. I know what you did in gaining the light of knowledge in these long four years. Listen to a sad story. You will need all your bravery! God be praised! You bear a Cuban heart!" He sighed, and began sadly:

"In the Ten Years' War, from sixty-eight to seventy-eight, there was no braver insurgent general than the rich planter who owned the superb domain of Palo Alto. Start not, my son; the very Palo Alto where you refuged!

"In the prime of manhood, a soldier who had traveled the world, knowing every form of cosmopolitan

life, he was a formidable foe to the baffled Spaniard. His reckless bravery, his success, his great talents, may have made him secret enemies among the insurgent leaders. Be it as it may, he attained the command of a great column, and then, growing ambitious, disdained the control of his superiors. I was then, as now, offering my life up, a possible daily sacrifice, for liberty!"

The young man drew closer to the old priest's side as he sobbed: "Six years after the beginning of the war, there came to us a thunderclap of defeat, shame, and misery. The brilliant general had allowed his whole command, priceless then to us, to be entangled in a gloomy defile. There was a hideous butchery, and the Spanish firing parties laughed as they reloaded their smoking guns!

"Our cause was doomed from that very hour. One after another the disheartened chiefs fell away. Some were chased to their death, some surrendered and made terms—others, God have mercy on their souls, sold out to the Spaniard, and gave up their faithful followers to slaughter." Padre Ruiz paused, in a storm of grief.

"This man—this man of whom you speak?" eagerly cried Andrés.

"Was officially reported dead," mournfully said the priest. "But a wounded Cuban refugee, five years later in Paris, found him dining at a great café with the Spanish ambassador.

"There were jewels on the traitor's fingers; he was living in the height of luxury. The patriot dashed a glass of wine in the face of the man who had sold an army to shame—there—before them all!

"There was a meeting at Fontainebleau the next morning, and the Spanish embassy buried with pomp the traitor, who fell at daybreak, under Delgado's avenging pistol."

Andrés Gomez's head had wearily dropped upon his hands, as, with a white face, he sat at the table. He dared not look into the old man's sorrowing eyes. "The story came back to us, and was told with bated breath, for we were all under the hell of the Spanish butcher then. Another page of Cuban treason, but—he—this man—was the first to break our lines, the first Judas. Ah! God, not the last!

"There was a priest," the old man sobbed, "who confessed a beautiful dying woman before this—a woman who had been chased away from Palo Alto with her babe in her arms."

The quick, gasping sobs of the young man now broke the awful silence of the room. "I only know," whispered the padre, "that the crafty general had left her to be chased away by the Spaniards, who apparently confiscated the great domain.

"It was done to give color to the story of his death on the battlefield. You know how the buzzards and the wild hogs obliterate the grim work of the sword! Alas! the priest knew from her lips of the husband's shameful secret visit under escort.

"When he begged her to share his golden shame on the Continent, Manuelita Parédes faced him in all the scorn of a betrayed wife: 'My husband is dead—you Spanish dog,' she cried. 'I am a Cuban, born

in honor, living in honor till this moment, and now I go out, as a beggar, to seek a grave in that Cuban soil, watered by the blood of the brave!" The old man paused, as Andrés gasped,

"She was —— —?"

"Manuelita Parédes, your blessed and sainted mother," cried the priest, as the young man fell on his knees before him.

"I was soon chased away into a refuge, and it was years before I was allowed to say mass again at this desecrated altar. Through Maria Velasco, my faithful housekeeper, I traced you out at last.

"The half-crazed husband had seized and taken away with him his only other child, a boy of three, when Manuelita Parédes left the hacienda of Palo Alto with her babe clasped to her breast. No one dared to bar the way to that gallant-hearted woman or to unclasp her arms, holding the fatherless infant to an unstained bosom.

"And now both the father and the boy whom he took away, are dead! You, my boy, are alone in the world. I will show you yet your brave mother's grave, with the inscription, 'Manuelita Parédes; *siempre fiel!*'" The priest ceased, his eyes were fixed on the floor.

"The name of the man who sold his troops to shame," hoarsely demanded Andrés, clutching at his breast as if to tear out the heart from his aching bosom.

"General Calixto Gomez, of Palo Alto, the man who fell, as Lucifer fell, out of the bright and starry skies into the deepest hell!"

"I have no father, even in memory!" groaned Andrés.

"You have a Father," cried Padre Ruiz, opening his arms. "I am His humble minister, and you are my son!" There was only the sound of the mingled sobs, as the youth dropped his head, like a tired child, upon the aged man's breast.

In an hour, silence wrapped the old church in its dusky pall of night, save when the Spanish sentinel hoarsely challenged the rounds, or halted some late reveler.

The youth had fallen into a deep sleep of exhaustion, but even in his dreams his lips parted in a smile, as he whispered, "*Mi madre querida!* Manuelita Parédes—*siempre fiel!*" Life had taken on a new meaning for him.

The few faithful of the scattered flock were astonished a week later, when Padre Ruiz, followed by a stout mozo descended the hill to Quemados station. The priest from neighboring Lissa said three masses before the old man returned from his visit to Guana-jay.

Scowling soldiers, leering officers, and thievish army followers jostled the old man and the tall, smooth-faced candidate at his side, as the train rattled along the rough military railroad.

"Damn these black robes, the scarecrows," muttered Ensign Gonzales to a mate. "Look at that hulking young brute glozing over his breviary. He would look better with a Mauser over his shoulder and a cartridge belt around his lazy loins!"

The insolent subaltern dropped his eyes as the young candidate turned on him a glance of sudden fierceness.

His companion jogged his elbow. "Fool," said he. "Remember General Weyler's orders! Don't abuse the clergy. They are the eyes and ears of loyal Spain."

"Forget not your promise," whispered the padre. "Remember your mission—your visit to Maria Velasco, your old nurse."

Three days later, Padre Ruiz climbed his secret staircase in the darkness of the night. A half dozen eager men awaited him there in the stronghold under the tiles. "*Amigos! Hermanos!*" he cried. "The telegraph has told me of the safe sailing of the steamer. Padre Villareal has sent me the Latin words agreed upon. In a week, *séa por Dios*, he will send me the cipher dispatch announcing the safe delivery of our funds.

"It was sent under seal to our fiscal agents, to be cabled by them to him at Bahia Honda, but only after the receipt of the funds. *Dios ayudarnos y, viva Cuba Libre!*"

"Your messenger seems young for such a task. I had a distant glimpse of him," said the chief of the secret Cuban council. "Who is he?"

"He is God's child, and my own son!" solemnly answered the padre. They glided away, marveling at his words.

"And now to pray that Maria Velasco, through Andrés, may save Mercedes Agramonte from the tyrant's hands," prayed the lonely old man.

CHAPTER V.

“OFF WITH THE OLD LOVE!”

It was a month after Padre Ruiz had dispatched Andrés Gomez to New York City by the secretly veiled route of Bahia Honda, when the old priest sat in his garden and watched two officers riding down the road in the glaring sunlight, westwardly toward Lissa. There was nothing in the passing of two military officers to excite remark, but he sprang to the window.

“That man is the image of Andrés, poor boy!” he murmured, as, with disgust, he recognized Colonel Max Lowenstein, inspector of the lines, as the chief of the party, followed by twenty bronzed, blue-clad Spanish cavalry, their loaded carbines at a poise.

“The other one, so strangely like!” muttered the astonished priest.

He fell on his knees before the little altar in his room, and prayed. “My God! How long, how long?”

For he hungered and thirsted now, for news of the absent son of his heart—the unhappy, fatherless boy.

It was a sad time. The heavy hand of Colonel Manuel de Herrera was now clutching at the throat of the little triune city, perched upon its limestone hills.

The rattle of musketry daily told of the end of those who were “pasado por las armas,” and these poor

victims were flung into the nearest ditch, without "bell, book, or candle."

No priest or nun was permitted to touch the carcasses of the wretched "insurgents."

Fifty thousand half-starved wretches, unarmed, unhoused, unfed, were now shivering in the "protected zones" between Marianao and Pinar del Rio.

In the open, debatable ground, guerilla and insurgent waged a horrid war to the knife! The soaring buzzards moved on in their airy cycles, showing the place of the latest carnage.

Day by day the march of troops, the rattle of armed railway trains, the passing of huge convoys, told of the incessant activity of Weyler, who only longed now for the crowning prize, the head of Antonio Maceo!

On this sunny morning Weyler had dispatched Colonel Max Lowenstein and Major José Gomez down to La Ceiba, to jointly execute a mission of grave importance.

"Go out and get him!" he angrily cried. "I can get any head in Cuba for money, but Maceo's! The man who brings it to me, if he is a gentleman, shall be a general before night!"

As the old priest sought his place of watchfulness by the oratory window, he marveled at the devilish ingenuity of the new administrador civil.

"Pablo Ortiz was an oily thief," murmured the padre, "but this new scourge is a devouring beast. No household was free from search, the 'guardia civil' dragged up before Pablo Alvarado hidalgo and hind, señora and the drab of the streets alike!"

The trebled line of sentinels shot at night the innocent beings blundering on their lines; the baleful watch-fires of war let up a zone of sixty miles in circuit, and the secret Cuban committee dared no more to meet in the retreat under the red-tiled roof.

A meaning word from the pulpit, old Domingo's furtive messages, or a few gestures at a funeral over the corpse of some one happily released from this hell on earth, alone could signify to the banded hearts, under the sword, that so far all was well as to their New York envoy.

The debatable zone was swept by day and night of all forage, useful animals, and means of subsistence. The area, a league wide around the fifty towns covered by the lines, showed no upturned furrow, no planted field. Gaunt and wolfish-eyed, the reconcentrados hovered in idleness under the shade of the palms by day, and at night sought the ravines, fleeing "like the covey to the rocks."

It was their only shelter for wife and daughter from the brutal passions of the swarms of armed men of both contending parties.

"A hell upon earth," mourned the silver-haired padre. "Would to God that I were dead!" he prayed, as he closed the window against the glaring, death-dealing sun. His only protection was his poverty and his unarmed helplessness.

And yet, he fain would linger on earth to hear of the success of Andrés Gomez's mission. It was true that the little local knot of patriots knew that the bank

drafts had been duly delivered at New York. The veiled Latin message had been received from Padre Villareal. But there was as yet no news of the arrival of the arms so vital to Maceo's success, and no tidings of the gallant boy. In hope deferred their hearts sickened.

"He will do something madly desperate," mourned Padre Mateo. For the young soldier's last words came back: "I have no father, not even in memory! And, as my life belongs to Cuba—if there is one above who is the Father of the orphaned, I go to Him.

"But, please God, not to fall on Cuba's last battlefield, till I have kissed the earth of Manuelita Parédes' grave, the mother who left a princely house a beggar—with her babe in her arms, and left all, even the dishonored name of Gomez behind!"

A gleam of hope animated his sorrowing soul. "Andrés may have achieved his mission, and be working his way up from the other end of the island," he mused. The resemblance to the officer who had ridden by returned to haunt him. "No! It could not be he! He would never trust his fiery temper with a Spanish escort. It would surely betray him. And, he would have given me some secret sign!"

Even old Domingo had returned fruitless from many foraging expeditions for news. Padre Ruiz dared not venture out among the Spanish officers at any time, lest his poor sanctuary should be violated and the local junta be sacrificed to the wrath of the Spanish butchers.

For now, Weyler's untiring hand was striking every-

where by day and night. The three towns of Marianao, Quemados, and Lissa were crouching like whipped hounds in silence, save for the great Café Alfonso, where the officers drank and diced their stolen ration money away, spending the remnant of the gains upon the lustrous-eyed harpies who follow the hot-hearted soldier—the Paphian guerrillas of war!

Alone this afternoon, under his little arbor, he sorrowed over the failure of Andrés Gomez's secret embassy, the duty nearest to his own heart.

The letter from New York of Maria Velasco, his old housekeeper, had opened a long vista of the past to him, and it was from her, as well as Andrés, that he fain would have cheering news.

A charitable family of rich refugees had taken Maria away to the land of liberty and safety, in those dark days after General Calixto Gomez's treachery in seventy-five had given up the disorganized insurgents of the Ten Years' War to a horrible Spanish vengeance.

And, "after many years," she, the faithful woman who had waited on the beloved Elisa Agramonte when she ruled over La Sevilla, had sent traces of the whereabouts of the defrauded orphan to whom the broad domain rightly belonged.

Forty years of introspection had given Padre Ruiz an insight into the ways of men.

"Where thy money is, there thy heart will be also!" he murmured.

In some vague way, he connected the oily benevolence of the Bishop of Havana, on the visit which had

so signally honored the poor parish priest, with a desire to trace out the lost heiress.

“And, why not?” he murmured.

“To-day, in magnificent La Sevilla, this polluted Venus, this dancer queen, holds her orgies with Manuel de Herrera, the commandante of Marianao. Oh! for the vengeance of God!”

The old priest well knew that long lines of poor wretches had been dragged up before the administrador civil, and the Marquis de Villar, seated there by the side of the beautiful witch who ruled over La Sevilla.

It was told him by one of the faithful women house servants, who bewailed the old days when gentle Elisa Alvarado ruled La Sevilla, before the coming of the Spanish dancer. Only the old servants from the hacienda stole over to mass or confession now.

“Padre,” sobbed old Elvira, the housekeeper, “they drag the poor men up there, before the table reeking with wines. ‘Do you know these to be good men?’ asks Colonel Herrera, fixing his wine-swollen eyes on the señora. She only pouts and smiles cruelly. The new administrador shakes his head fiercely. ‘Ladrones todos!’”

“‘Then, captain, you may as well shoot them all! There’ll be no mistake to speak of! I don’t want fever to break out in our jail. If they were good men, they would be now in the Spanish army.’” So speaks Herrera. For the last month, this saturnalia of blood had gone on, until even the deaf old padre could recognize

the sharp, crashing platoon volleys at the fall of night.

Not even a ditch grave in the Campo Santo was given these doomed wretches. Their carcasses were thrown into the boiling pool under the culvert below the red redoubt on Marianao hill, where the fetid stream in the ravine creeps to the sea, laden with the sewage of three populous towns!

And, over all, the pall of death, the brazen skies only dotted with the soaring buzzards by day, the grewsome silence only broken at night by the shrieking bugles of alarm, or the sharp crack of the sentinel's rifle.

It was these conditions which enabled Governor-General Valeriano Weyler to cable to His Most Christian Majesty, the schoolboy King of Spain, through His Most August Mother, that "pacification was energetically proceeding." The pacification of the yawning and hungry grave!

"Only may God grant that Andrés returns to me, that I may know little Mercedes Agramonte far away from the clutches of these intriguers," mused the padre, as he rose for the solemn vespers. "Should they find her, they will bring her back here—perhaps marry her, perforce, to some court favorite. If she resists, there is the awful choice—the death in life of a convent, the shameful death, after a dishonored life, in Cabaña's fortress! Pray God that Andrés may have reached her side!"

A strange, passive wisdom now animated the old padre's every act. He felt that some dark drama was being played, in which he would not even be an on-

looker, the gage being the superb estate worth three millions.

“It is only gold they want! Gold—blood-stained, bought with sacrifice of soul and body—that red gold, for which family honor and kindred have been always betrayed; gold, the clinking, yellow reward of every human villainy; gathered up, only soon to drop from the palsied hand of death or to be cast abroad by the riotous heir; to be the prey of the fortune hunter. Oh! cosmopolitan god of all races, ages, and climes—the lust of gold rules earth, and will, until time shall be no more!”

Living for years “in the foremost and focal flame” of revolution and butchery, the padre wisely decided upon a policy of absolute silence.

The bishop, the officers, this wanton woman, the alcaides and thieving officials, none of them dare to haunt the sacred shades of this deserted church! God’s oasis in the desert is a rotten paradise! I will avoid them! If the sword falls, if I am betrayed, I will die here, but only at the steps of the altar! I will never desert my post!”

He feared no clumsy spies, no busybodies, for a half-dozen poor women left widowed by the war, had taken possession of the unoccupied wing of the rectory. These faithful drudges with their fatherless children hovered around the church and rectory, obedient to Domingo’s slightest wish.

The offerings of the faithful kept them alive; their herds of children scoured the hills for plantains, cocoa-

nuts, bananas, and brought in, now and then, fish from the shores, where thousands of lazy Cubans choose to starve with the larder of the sea open at their lazy feet.

There was but one galling dread, some sudden descent of the watchful military. Some one of the little circle of the secret junta might—through drink, or pride, or love—boast of the star chamber there over the altar under the red tiled roof.

With a stern resolution, Padre Ruiz had prepared ample stores of kerosene above in the altar, with bundles of rags ready to saturate! The doors below, heavy iron barriers, always kept locked by day and night, to admit air, but not thieves, would delay the search party long enough for either Domingo or himself to fire the attic.

"If we are left alive," he reasoned, "the flames will keep them away! If we are dead, it matters not! Dead men tell no tales!"

For years, he had kept no scrap of paper save the humdrum records telling of the slow revolution of the wheel of human life in the parish: "birth, baptism, confirmation, marriage, death, burial, . . . the simple annals of the poor."

The essential facts of birth and death being, after all, the 0° and 360° in all human life, whether king or cadger, beauty or drudge, saint or sot!

For the round of existence begins in its circle—a radius more or less extended, according to rank. Fortune is merely the weird play of circumstance. Begins, mark

you, at o—nothing—and whether a clown or a Wallenstein, a Cromwell or a Messalina, a Washington or a Caligula; ends, after the sweep around the circle, in o—nothing—meeting, touching and abiding with the zero from which fate swept the marker of Time on—the nothingness of life!

Humbly pious, fanatically patriotic, benevolent, devout, and yet trusting in that Father who guides the sea bird home over the darkened and trackless wave, Padre Mateo Ruiz only prayed that in trying to save that one young life, far away, from the schemes of those who would rob her of fair La Sevilla, he had not sent to a treacherous death the gallant boy who had no father—not even in memory!

Wary and cautious, Padre Ruiz had already set all his house in order. His old “logic,” his half-forgotten boyish studies, returned to prove to him that there was more than a sudden official hospitality (long forgotten) in the affability of the Bishop of Havana! “Who dines you well, will ask a favor,” is an old proverb!

And Padre Ruiz, over his glass of Xerès de la Frontera, slyly smiled at the futility of the Bishop’s brotherly advances.

“They can never reach her save through me,” he concluded. “Maria Velasco is true as steel! Andrés would die and make no sign! The Bishop of Havana is a good man, per se, there can be no one behind him but this bloody butcher Weyler, who has forced him on to the inquiry! But, God has delivered the helpless child out of their hands! They can not find the dove’s resting place!”

He was pacing the floor in a supreme content, thanking God that the only real lady of La Sevilla was safe under the northern lights, when a messenger glided into his room. "I came, Padre, disguised as a peddler from Bahia La Honda with a message from Padre Vil-lareal."

With a sinking heart, the startled priest read the few words scrawled in latin: "Taken away by strangers. Nothing known. Coming." There was one key word which proved that the message was from a living Andrés.

In the hour of his vain boasting, the old man was brought down, humbled to the dust!

"This is the work of Pablo Ortiz," he moaned. "I can see it all! His sly disappearance! May God protect us all!"

And all that night, the old man's pillow was wet with bitter tears, though he knew not that the green lizards glided in silence over the grave in Atares ditch, where the administrador civil gave up his life after telling all that he knew! A notable victim to the fatal policy of frankness!

On this very evening, beside a picket fire fifteen leagues toward the green blue mountains of Pinar del Rio, Colonel Max Lowenstein and Major José Gomez made merry in the bivouac.

They had ridden far afield at the head of their fierce-eyed cavalry, and the wine had flowed fast and free. There was a reckless, defiant mood now possessing the German adventurer.

For weeks, he had been busied in posting picket and grand guard—ambuscade and man trap! He had been building lines, blockhouses, and artfully placed redoubts.

His stern chief at Havana had loaded him with praise and given him *carte blanche*, but kept him, a human meteor, moving out on the very line of battle, even as Uriah the Hittite was deftly given the post of honor in olden days.

The astute German well knew that he had no true friend in the hard-hearted crew riding under the black-browed Weyler; and yet, he yearned, after the fashion of his kind, for *brüderschaft*.

Secretly irritated that the governor-general always kept a Spanish officer at his side in these dangerous ventures, he began to see that the soldier of fortune is never trusted.

Even on this very day, when he had tried to linger at La Sevilla for a half-day's march, Major José Gomez had sternly reminded him of the black chief's resentment. "I do not care to rot in the dungeons of Morro, Colonel," flatly said Major Gomez. "You may take chances with Weyler! I never will! I will ride on and report by telegraph, as ordered! You know that he sits at that huge map of his with a time table of his detachments and a chronometer at hand!"

So, with a raging heart, Colonel Lowenstein had ridden by within the very sight of the grand portico of La Sevilla! Absence had fed his still unslaked passions, and Juana's letters, still tender and loyal, were after all but a poor balm to his anxious heart.

It was while systematically drinking the young Major into a confidential mood, that Lowenstein became suddenly suspicious of his "silent partner" in the traffic in arms and his possible partner in the future division of La Sevilla.

"Gott im Himmel!" he gasped, "I am alone out here with this sly Spanish fellow! I might be betrayed! In Havana, I am under the eyes of the whole German colony! But here, there would be no one to tell the story!" He practiced his old *bier kneipe* arts until the boastful young Lothario at his side swung around upon his adventures in New York. "Secret mission, my boy," purred the colonel. "It was only to plunge into New York's gayeties! The American *fräuleins*—*hein?*"

"I did deliver the governor-general's instructions to the consul-general," proudly began the Major, "to lay the groundwork for the purchase of old Maceo's head! But, *Caramba*, I was swindled out of my reward!

"I had to go and get the prettiest girl in the world out of a convent, and then, turn her over to the keeping of two sour-faced old nuns! *Dios!* what a beauty! But, Papa Weyler only trusted me with the legal papers, and even the Spanish consul-general sent his wife along to see the young goddess safely on board the steamer. And, never a single glimpse of her did I get on 'La Vigilancia' till, in one of those cursed close carriages with the little solid windows with a cross cut in them, my lady was whisked away to the Visitacion convent at Havana. *Madre de Dios!* I trembled when the governor-general asked me if I had even spoken to her! I told him not."

“ ‘Forget even her name,’ said he, ‘it may cost you your head to remember!’

“And, a pretty name, too,” the maudlin roysterer babbled on. “Mercedes Agramonte, owns a big place, too, down here—La Sevilla. God! what’s that?”

It was ten minutes before the detachment drove off a few Cuban night prowlers who had ridden by and boldly emptied their revolvers into the lines, firing point-blank at the bivouac lights.

A half an hour later, Colonel Lowenstein gloomily said: “I must leave you in command and go back to Marianao to have my wound dressed. One of those fools of ours cut me badly with his sword bayonet while rallying behind the tree from behind which I was firing.”

It was indeed true that the German held up a bloody and a bandaged arm. The little dash had sobered Major José Gomez, and in three hours, with an escort of ten men, Max Lowenstein, with a raging devil in his heart, rode as the crow flies straight back to Marianao.

It was morning when he reached the sleepy town and he was forced to wait until the afternoon to see Madame Juana Agramonte. That lady had been for two hours expected to return from Havana, whither she had departed on the early morning train to avoid the glaring sunlight.

The colonel’s handsome face wore a look of undue sternness as he stood with his bandaged arm in a sling to welcome the returning goddess.

Something in his face told the capricious beauty

that there was a quarrel imminent. Behind her, as a social shield, the Marquis de Herrera and the new administrador were en train.

The eyes of the men met in an undisguised hostility in the perfunctory introduction. It was an hour before the excited German could induce la señora to accompany him out to the incense-breathing garden.

He instinctively felt that he had been supplanted, and, mean at heart, a spasm of reckless suspicion obscured his usually well-poised mind. The coquetry of Madame Juana with the noble marquis had enraged the renegade.

And so, without waiting, he broke out into a storm of accusation. He feared now to lose his share of the golden spoils. "And so, madame, not content with lying to me about the ownership of this estate, you have doomed that innocent girl, Mercedes Agramonte, to all the horrors of the Visitacion convent!

"You will, of course, divide the spoils, and she, will probably end her career as one of Weyler's broken-hearted, cast-off mistresses! Your share will be half the plunder—is that so? I know all. I know who escorted the girl down from New York to the very gateway of the nunnery! And your new lover, this hulking brigand Herrera——"

"Not another word, you coward," cried Juana Argramonte, pale faced, as she clapped her hands for the servant in waiting. "Manuel shall sheathe his sword in your heart to-night! I know all now—of Pepita, the strolling dancer ——"

"What were you, but a café wanton when old Agramonte found you in the gutter," raged Lowenstein, but he ceased, as the rattle of a scabbard announced a hasty visitor.

Glaring at him like a tigress at bay, Juana saw the grand form of El Negrito, the governor-general's famous negro orderly! The huge black grinned as he handed the colonel a paper. "Forthwith, I am to report your departure, by telegraph, from the station."

Colonel Lowenstein tore open the dispatch. Had his clumsy ruse of the self-inflicted wound been discovered? He growled, "Say that I leave, and, on the instant!" The black dashed away without a word.

"I leave you forever!" snarled Max.

"Go, and may all the fiends of hell pursue you," shrieked Juana, darting by him with the swiftness of a leopard.

As Lowenstein mounted his horse, the heavy hand of Colonel Herrera was laid upon the bridle, the marquis' face was black with passion.

"In a week, Señor," coldly said Lowenstein. "I ride to the front on the governor-general's orders! You dare not stay me, now!" There was the gleam of a revolver in the rider's hand.

"Hasta luego!" yelled Colonel Herrera, as the maddened German galloped away, never turning his head. "I will have that cur's heartblood," he swore by all the saints and all their bones, but he forgot the defeated adversary that night, when Juana Agramonte, at his side, sang in her thrilling voice, the songs of love which made his pulses bound.

"It's off with the old love and, on with the new," raged Max Lowenstein, as he rode swiftly forward, followed by El Negrito, mounted on a huge white horse.

"I am to conduct you to the new camp," said the reformed "nanigo," the chief scout of Weyler's cloud of irregulars. "There is trouble at the front," the black grumbled, smacking his huge lips at the scent of blood. "I took Major Gomez over to the train, and your command is in a place of ambush selected by me. It is 'alerta' now, for El Toro, Chico Velasquez, and El Matador have stolen within our lines!"

Late that night, Colonel Lowenstein rode into the hidden bivouac.

Not even a single fire was permitted, nor the gleam of a tabaco. "It is for life and death," whispered El Negrito. "I will watch the guards. Sleep you! I have arranged your couch."

The stalwart German threw himself on the rude bed of serapes and horse cloths, draining the rum bottle held out by El Negrito. "I must think—think," he muttered. "When I can leave this hellhole, I will kill that brute Herrera! I dare not brave Weyler! She will lose heart and tell me all! Perhaps I may yet save the money due on the arms! I will kill that brute, get what I can and go home. Yes . . . home."

All the next day, Max Lowenstein lay with an aching head in his hidden lair. El Negrito visited the concealed troopers, and stole in to bring the food and water. "Be ready," the negro whispered. "I will rush to you when they enter into our trap!"

A strange aching in the back, a dimness of vision, a horrible nausea overcame the burly German as night fell upon them. "No! No! I can drink no more. Water! Water," he raved, as El Negrito forced the bottle to his lips.

And then, with visions of the far-away vineclad banks of the Rhine clouding his eyes, the sick man's head fell back in a deadly stupor.

Two days later, in the governor-general's secret cabinet, General Weyler smiled softly as El Negrito made his brief report. "The drugged liquor fetched him. That last drink with the poison laid him out."

"Here is a hundred doubloons," sharply cried the dictator. "A hundred more if you bring me his body with no mark on it. Go!"

There was a stately military funeral in Havana a week later. As it passed under the windows of the palace, Weyler muttered, "He, also, knew too much! His friends certainly have done him great honor. Now to send for Madame Juana Agramonte and to give her the *ordre du jour*. Colonel Herrera certainly has made the running." And down below in the guardroom that night, El Negrito was gayly playing off the second hundred doubloons at monte.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE CONFESSIONAL.

The long days of the fetid, steaming Cuban summer dragged slowly along. Drenching, heated sheets of white rain obscured the far blue mountains and hid the sculptured headlands washed by the sapphire seas.

Marianao was now crowded by a licentious rabble of soldiery, and the roads were all lined with the dead and dying.

In these days of horror, pity stole into even the flinty heart of Juana Agramonte, for, while war's havoc devastated the fair land, the incessant guerrilla butchery continued, and every grove and ravine had its settlement of starving reconcentrados.

The fields were all swept clear of beast and crop, at night the red glare of burning canefields marked the grim reprisals of the maddened insurgents. Luxurious country houses scattered out as far as Guanajay were left either as roofless wrecks or else filled with the enfeebled soldiery; were mere lazar houses, where "calentura," yellow fever and smallpox preyed upon the poor peninsular peasants drafted over from Spain to feed Weyler's deathmill. In these dreary days, the mistress of La Sevilla was left with abundant food for reflection.

Colonel Herrera was no mere squire of dames. His iron hand at the judgment table, his ringing voice on the parade, his ceaseless hunting down of the foes of Spain, had endeared him to the brute who had earned from the whole world his deathless sobriquet of Butcher Weyler. He was ever in the field.

And yet, the man who had supplanted the dead Lowenstein was a jealous and watchful lover. His vigilant tenderness had posted two companies of special sharpshooters as a picket guard around La Sevilla.

There was a military telegraph tying together the blockhouses, a lieutenant and a platoon were stationed at the mansion on the hill under the royal palms, and in all the widespread desolation only La Sevilla smiled out fair as a garden of the Lord.

The three towns of Marianao, Quemados, and Lissa were now a single, strongly fortified camp. Great redoubts, linked in a cross-fire chain, covered the whole ground from Chorrera in a semi-circle over to the southwest, fronted by the sharpshooters, blockhouses, and the beautiful old arched stone bridge of Lissa, which now bristled with rapid-fire guns.

There arose rifle-pits, too, in fan-like sweeps, thrown far out to the west, and every ravine and defile was picketed by day and ambuscaded by night.

Without, in the league-wide zone, the human buffers of the starving thousands were human alarm clocks to signal the coming of the stern Cuban riders, who asked for no quarter, who grimly stripped the prisoners naked, bound their hands, and then, with the gleaming machete, butchered the helpless shrieking victims.

Clouds of the starving reconcentrados daily besieged Don Pablo Alvarado, the suave administrador civil, begging him for food. "Dig, plow and plant, my children! The land is fertile," was his dry rejoinder, as he would saunter up to La Sevilla for the dainty "almuerzo," or, the superb evening "comida."

Over Juana Agramonte's dainty table Colonel Herrera and Don Pablo now exchanged suave congratulations upon "the progress of the pacification."

"I reported to General Weyler," gayly said Colonel Herrera, "that the ground would soon be all clear in our front—that these people would not labor! And so, one benefit is, that hereafter when we find a living man between our lines and the insurgents' outposts, we are justified in shooting him, at once. It saves us all the bother of trials. Truly, an economic arrangement!"

"What did the General say?" demanded Alvarado, helping himself to an ortolan.

"That he wished to see the last of this human scum swept into the Campo Santos," placidly replied Herrera, as he drank a glass of champagne to the health of the entrancing hostess.

And yet, on the night of this particular banquet, all three were haunted with their individual cares. The shriek of the ironclad train sounded always in their ears. "I must leave you, Juana," whispered Herrera. "They blew up a bridge to-day and killed forty and wounded a hundred of my poor men.

"Where they get their dynamite, God only knows. Weyler told me that he had found out that brute of a

Dutchman, Lowenstein, had been engaged in secretly trafficking with the rebels, through some German Jew friends whom he protected. That's what Weyler had him killed for!"

"My God! Manuel," faltered Juana, "I thought he died of the 'sun guarro,' or yellow fever!"

Herrera laughed. "You don't care, *mi querida*," he said, as he kissed her pallid lips. "I would have run my sabre through his heart for daring to insult you. I must go out now and attend to my wounded! These insurgents make my life a hell on earth."

And he tore aside the clinging arms of the woman, who whispered, "Don't leave me to-night, Manuel. The very air is full of horrors."

"Don Pablo shall come and see you every day," he soothingly said, as he grasped his sabre and cap and sped away.

The two men left the hacienda together. As they walked down the hill in the moonlight, with a frightened face, Don Pablo unbosomed his own fears. "I am in a constant danger of my life," he muttered. "General Weyler still insists that a nest of conspirators is in active ferment here in Marianao. I have spied, I have punished, bullied, threatened and even spent my own gold! I am baffled at every turn. You know what will happen if Weyler enrages himself!"

"The nearest firing platoon, or, perhaps," coolly answered the colonel, lighting a choice cigar, "you might only be quietly strangled in your cell at Cabañas."

"See here, Pablo," he said, "the old priest is poor.

Go and see Padre Ruiz! Those fellows all love money, the good yellow gold! Go to a mass or so! Ask the old fool down to dinner! Fill him up with good wine! He can unlock the secrets of the confessional, if he will. He can pick up all the women's babble."

"A superb plan!" joyously cried the administrator. "I will even offer to repair his church! There are a few shotholes in it! If there are plotting rebels here, the old men can be trapped through their churchgoing wives, always timid—the young fellows, fiery lovers all, through their sweethearts! I'll go and see him tomorrow."

When they separated, Colonel Herrera said gravely: "See here, Pablo, you and I live under the impending sword! There's that young fellow José Gomez. He has been made Colonel and Chief Aide to Weyler in place of the hulking Dutchman, whom El Negrito put out of the way.

"Now, Gomez is a gambler, a man fond of 'le beau sexe,' he is poor, he lives a showy life! Feed him up with gold; you can easily screw it out of these brutes here! They are all robbing the Crown! Keep Gomez' pockets always filled and then you have a friend at Weyler's ear! Don't forget this! *Mucho cuidado! Vayase v. con Dios!* Send for the old padre and give him a good dinner! He is half starved! Get out your very best wine! That will loosen his tongue, and remember, do not spare the doubloons."

Left alone to her own moody misgivings, Juana Agra-

monte had sought her boudoir. The house was a very fortress now, with the gardenwalls all loopholed for musketry. There were even sandbag barricades at the angles of the great mansion, and the white tents of the watchful soldiery were now scattered around the splendid gardens.

Down in the summer house in the midst of the beautiful retreat where she had parted with the man betrayed to his death by the brutal "nanigo," the young lieutenant of the guard was making merry with Rosine, the pretty French maid, who was the arbiter of Madame Juana's toilet mysteries.

Though from her open windows, the guilty mistress of La Sevilla could hear the far-ringing bugles of the triple guard lines, she shuddered as she gazed at her own blanched face in the glass. The face of her dead lover, Max Lowenstein, returned this night to haunt her. "Killed—murdered—out there alone!"

At last, she knew the dreaded hand which had stricken down the man whose lips had sworn so often an undying love.

That spider Weyler, seated over his blood-stained map of Cuba, striking by day and night, dealing out death, the nameless horrors of the Spanish prison ordeal, or secret assassination!

In sheer self-protection, she thanked God that the departed administrador civil lay dead in the noisome angle of Atares ditch. "It was he," she murmured, "who held up the long fraud for these five years since my cold-hearted husband died. It was his hand, not

mine, that signed the papers, he alone went within the law!"

She laughed aloud, in her nervous fear, at the craft which the dead Ortiz had shown. "He never dared to allow me to sign a paper or make a public appearance.

"He handled the revenues! There is nothing to bring up against me! Nothing!"

And yet, a nameless terror possessed her. Too well she knew that Weyler spared neither innocent nor guilty; too well she knew of white-bosomed women torn from their homes at night, to languish in the dungeons of Morro and Cabañas, to be abandoned later to the brutal lusts of guardsmen and jailer, and finally to be strangled by common hangman, after the fierce negro convicts had despoiled the naked bodies of the trembling wretches.

"Never!" she cried, springing to her cabinet and secreting a vial of poison and a dagger in her bosom.

The dagger was the very one which the dead Max had wrested from her in her access of jealous fury. The poison was a gift of an old Voodoo negro queen.

How often in the years of her slavery to the unbending old Agramonte had she dreamed of mingling three drops of the colorless fluid with his morning coffee.

Fear, abject physical fear, alone had restrained her, for well she knew the old planter would have slain her, even were it with the last convulsive grasp of his hands.

Her eyes fell upon Max Lowenstein's picture, where she had thrust it away out of the sight of the saturnine Herrera, a lover whom she instinctively feared, and yet dared not betray.

She was at the turning of the roads of life! Herrera's boundless influence over General Weyler was her only safeguard now.

"It is better, after all," mused the now defiant woman as she gazed down upon the picture in her hand. "He was a matchless swordsman. "Poor Max! He would have slain Manuel Herrera as he did our best duelists, who called him out! I would then have been his slave forever."

"And he lied to me—for mere money."

She threw the picture down in disgust. "The brute would not even tell me who brought this girl from New York! He would have held that secret over me, to keep me his slave! And—he did know! It is well that he died! If Manuel does not know, he can soon find out," she softly smiled, as she ceased, and then whispered, "I shall make myself beautiful for him."

With a thrill of triumph, she recalled how the strong man had yielded to her pleadings, and lost in the maze of her clinging arms, had told her all the story of the death of the poor administrator.

Even the last details of how Major José Gomez had "proved the cartridges," were now known to her.

"This man, Colonel Gomez, he is young, ardent, handsome,—" she trembled and then dismissed the thought. She well knew that the fiery Herrera would

brook no rival, and, with a sinister smile she recalled the fact that only the gray-haired Alvarado had been brought to the hacienda by the man whose secretly prisoned ward she was. La Sevilla was now the Castle Perilous for any lovesick swain.

Cunning, ignorant, vicious, Juana Garcia had early learned all the arts of the café and the intrigues of the streets.

And now all her past life rose up to aid her! "I will cleave to the strongest, and let the others battle for me. Manuel shall be both my slave and my shield. I will not try to work upon this young Gomez."

It came to cheer her that the mysterious claimant, that Mercedes Agramonte, whom she had never seen, had already been hidden away for a month in the Visitation convent by the crafty Weyler. "He may be working slyly on the young girl's ignorance," she mused. She well knew that all the private papers of the dead official, her secret partner in crime, had been removed.

This was another lovewon secret of the fiery Manuel, given up in a tender mood.

The beauty drained a glass of fiery cordial, as she laid her head upon her pillow. "The governor-general has surely only peaceful schemes," she satisfactorily decided, "for, he could have reached me any day for the last two years, and any hour in the past month! If he sends for me, I have only my womanhood, my ignorance, and Manuel to protect me. As for Max and the old miser, Weyler must have learned nothing from

them; otherwise, I should have worn handcuffs instead of bracelets long before this."

There was a triumphant smile on the face of la Señora Juana Agramonte the next day as she drove out of her gates in a superb victoria. There was an escort of honor riding in front, and, whispering words of comfort was her lover, seated at her side. "The general desired me, Juana *querida*, to bring you in to Havana to dine with him! He has often heard of your beauty. And, fear nothing—I am with you as your friend. Fear nothing—a queen might be honored in this tête-à-tête dinner in the young king's house—for the royal standard floats over you!"

With feline quickness, Juana Agramonte veiled her rising fears, and, in her mind, swore to give the tenderest gleams of her midnight eyes to the great dictator.

On the field where she could fight fair, so far she had found all men alike—her willing and easy victims! It was the battleground of her choice!

Colonel Herrera laughed merrily as they drove along through Marianao to see the administrador civil, pompously parading the venerable priest, in his volante, through the village street. "The wary old fish has at last taken the bait!" he chuckled. "Once that we get all we can out of him, when we have trapped his secret friends, these damned insurgent, crawling spies, then his carcass can go to the boneyard, and my friend Pablo can get all his gold back! If I can fool this artful old priest into betraying his flock, then, Don Vale-

riano will make me a general. It is a day of days—for good luck!”

When the afternoon shadows told of the approaching hour for vespers, Padre Mateo Ruiz was driven homeward in the happiest of moods. It was not the handsome donation of the administrador for the parish, it was not the promise of a repair of the church, but the happy news, fettering through an enemy's hands, of the safe arrival of the great shipment of arms and munitions for which the absent Andrés Gomez had risked his unhappy young life.

By the happy chance of a passing emissary playing the “double spy,” the padre had known for two weeks that Andrés had safely returned and joined again the heroic Maceo! His bosom beat with pride to know the gallant boy, now a captain of a picked company of one hundred irregulars, and already gaining honor on the firing lines.

When the administrador had opened his heart in a wooden-horse confidence of the old Trojan brand, the priest was secretly entranced with joy!

“You see, *amigo mio*,” confided Alvarado, “we must close up every rathole! This devil of a Maceo appears now with artillery, with a good store of repeating arms, and he has successfully landed a heavy consignment of dynamite, ammunition, medicines, and weapons. Enough is known that he had aid from those practiced in the local arrangements of our lines, and with powerful friends here, at Bahia Honda, and Guanajay.

"In the last two weeks, a dozen explosions have cost us three hundred lives, paralyzed our railroad, and damaged us a half-million pesos. General Weyler can have you made a Bishop! You must help us! Come to my house, my friend. Your place at table awaits you! Money," he lowered his voice, "you can freely demand from me! No! Do not deprecate! I respect your holy office. A loyal churchman, you need name no names, only indicate to me, to your friend, your fellow-laborer here, how to set the snares! Let them catch themselves!"

It was indeed a tempting bait! But the sudden growth of affection of the Bishop of Havana had alarmed the old priest, forgotten, in poverty, for twenty long years.

When he suavely promised his secret help to the wily Alvarado, he said: "Señor administrador, in only one way can I come to you and aid with my reports—secretly, at night! Otherwise, my intimacy with you would frighten away the game. The people here would take alarm at seeing their poor old priest the intimate of your luxurious home!"

"Rightly said, and wisely judged," decreed the administrador. "It shall be as you wish. And all of my officials and the military will have orders to avoid troubling your church or rectory, for then the net will be open—the birds will surely come!"

To know Andrés safe, successful in his mission, and promoted to high rank; to know the Lone Star victorious by the confession of Weyler's intimates, was a

joyous bulletin, but, yet, the ominous message of the lad grated upon his heart!

“Taken away by strangers—nothing known.” The words weighed upon his heart like a death sentence! “Can Ortiz have discovered the girl through Maria Velasco’s imprudence, and spirited her away to Spain? Poor lamb! It is her fair inheritance they would rob, for the time has arrived when she should claim her own. Even murder, or burial in a Spanish prison convent, may be her portion!”

The old padre was dreaming over the possibilities of the sudden departure of the wily administrador, and all ignorant of his death. “Some one has betrayed her!” he sighed, as he robed himself for vespers.

It was a scene of Oriental luxury in General Weyler’s private dining-room that night, when Colonel Herrera retired to order the orchestra to delight the governor-general’s fair guest with its superb music.

The table gleamed with silver and golden plate, and Señora Juana Agramonte found that the stern dictator knew how to sue with pleading eyes. The general had been a courtly host, and, on her chosen battleground, the star of old Seville shone out in witching, baleful fire.

The jeweled hand trembled in Weyler’s grasp as he seized the moment of Herrera’s absence. “Señora Juana,” he whispered, with burning accents, “I shall come to see your paradise of La Sevilla! I have a charge to lay upon your loyal soul! You, lovely one, may be a signal friend of Spain. A countess’ coronet

would become you! Colonel Herrera shall, of my coming, advise you! You know the trammels of etiquette! But when I come, he can be sent away! I, the governor-general, need you! May I rely upon your welcome—upon your secrecy?" He kissed her slender fingers, as she drew a red rose from her bosom and dropped it in his hand.

And the compact was sealed in sparkling wine, mingled with kisses! When, two hours later, the carriage clattered away, the governor-general softly laughed, as he ordered his coupé to drive him to Señorita Isabel's pretty dovecote. "This handsome she-devil, Madame Juana, will serve my purpose as a lay figure, now that La Sevilla is ready to drop into my hands—a rich plum! And Herrera," he laughed, "will gladly marry her, with a good promotion! Thank God, I have the power! The game now is mine. Now for the pretty pigeon in the convent! She shall flutter down to my wrist! *Caramba*, what a racket Isabel will make! I must keep the whole matter under the rose!"

It was at the hour of ten, when old Padre Ruiz was closing the creaking doors of the church at Marianao, that a chorus of yells rang out, and a half dozen shots whizzed around him! As a man rushed into the archway, the priest's heart told him of the absent Andrés' fight to reach him with the tidings he craved. When old Domingo slowly opened the doors, and the soldiery poured in, Padre Ruiz stood in the door of his confessional box all unmoved. "Search the church if you

will!" he said, as he sank to his knees in prayer. And the baffled bloodseekers found in truth no one! "The dog has escaped!" they yelled, and rushed out.

CHAPTER VII.

WEYLER TAKES A TRICK.

There was grave concern upon the face of the suave administrador civil on the morning after the forcible entry of the sacred precincts of the parish church of Marianao. Seated upon his terrace, enjoying his luxurious breakfast, there was that in the face of his visitor, the old priest, which awed him.

"*Punica fides*, my dear señor," sturdily remarked Padre Mateo. "I have never sought friendship with the Spanish secular authorities. In twenty years of tumult, the shadow of the cross on my church has always protected even the criminal refugee! This brutal intrusion, while I was busied in the confessional——"

"A fatal mistake," purred the startled civilian.

"But, the guard of forty men continued all night around the holy inclosure!" hotly retorted Ruiz. "I am going to report this outrage to the Bishop of Havana."

In fact, a carriage soon rattled up to the gate, the waiting driver saluting the padre.

"The fugitive surely entered your church," continued Alvarado.

"And ran out at the side door, escaping assassination in the house of God! I am told that he darted through

one of the alleys opposite and gained the canefields beyond the town," coldly said the priest. "And now, sir, for the first time in fifty years, the Angelus will not ring from Marianao tower!

"I have sent word to all the faithful that all religious observance is suspended by force; I will continue to say my duty masses in private. I leave the living, sir, in your hands! Their blood be on your head! The dead rest in the hands of God! There lies a corpse to-day in the chancel! It will never pass armed guards at the door of the house of God!"

With a severe bow, the venerable padre strode down the walk. He never noticed the startled official hurrying alone at his side.

"To the bishop's palace in Havana!" the priest cried. "And, *pronto!*"

In five minutes the administrador reached the church, whence the cries of a furious mob resounded.

It was with difficulty that the frightened Alvarado could reach Colonel Herrera, who, sword in hand, sat upon his horse, only waiting now to give his irritated troops the order to fire.

A motley crowd of men, women, and children were pressing up even to the bayonets of the guard. "*Viva el padre! Fuera los soldados!*" resounded on all sides. The church side entrances were all closed and barred. The main doors were locked, and old Domingo, with a cross bearer and four robed acolytes stood bare-headed upon the steps. It was a crucial moment! A defiance to the army!

"This is your work, colonel," murmured Alvarado. "Let me now try my hand!" He whispered to his chief a few words and the marquis grimly smiled assent.

There were stormy cheers when the alcalde promised that in half an hour the last soldiers should be withdrawn, if the people would only peaceably disperse. The knots of half-crazed bigots sullenly broke up as, with a wave of his sword, Colonel Herrera dismissed the main body of the guard.

Two singular incidents signalized the withdrawing of the last sentinels. The first was the arrival of the parish priest of Lissa, with his full religious staff, in their robes, bearing the cross, the banners, and the Blessed Host—the emblem of white-robed peace.

The church doors were slowly swung open by old Domingo, and the sacred procession disappeared within. While the sound of weird chanting arose from the dim interior, a body of twenty civil policemen, in plain clothes, posted themselves around the church and rectory, guarding every exit.

Colonel Herrera sheathed his sword, and laughingly said: "Alvarado, you are a genius! Come over and have breakfast with Señora Bright Eyes! This trick is worthy of Weyler himself!"

As the administrador's carriage drove up, old Domingo, the sacristan, trembling with rage, shook his fist after the two retreating dignitaries. "Andrés Gomez is lost!" he murmured. "The wolves leave us, true, but these lice of Egypt, the police, will never quit us by day or night!"

It was indeed true that the sacristan had fathomed Alvarado's crafty design. The humble official had not been deceived by the simplicity of Padre Ruiz's manner.

"I will trap the old fox now," mused Alvarado. "Day and night the civil police shall never quit their post! If they have hidden the wounded Cuban spy within the church inclosure, he will only leave it for the yawning grave!"

When, late that night, Padre Ruiz returned from the hospitable embraces of the Bishop of Havana, a staff officer on the gallop had already carried the apologies of the courtly commandant of Marianao for the seeming sacrilege.

There was a touch of sarcasm in the words, "Our men, trailing a Cuban assassin, who had slain two of our sentinels and wounded a passing staff officer, found blood stains leading into the church, and we can find no marks of an exit! We did, however, find his heavy revolver, of American manufacture, and one of the newest model! We leave the whole matter with the civil authorities and your lordship to explain to the governor-general the mysterious translation of the hard-pressed insurgent spy, who was in plain view till he turned the corner of the church!"

Alas! Father Ruiz groaned, in agony of heart, that night, as he watched poor Andrés Gomez, moaning on a bed of pain, in the secret retreat under the tiled roof.

The heavy ball, passing through the shoulder, had mercifully broken no bone, but opium alone would

suffice to control the sufferer's moans in his fevered ravings. There was danger of detection should he rave.

"He may die, and I never know the truth!" sorrowfully cried the padre. "Only Domingo and I are left to guard him. I dare not summon a surgeon. On feast days and Sundays we must both be in the church! Whom will God raise up to help us now! I dare trust to no one!"

On his way to Havana, he had warned all the secret junta to avoid the rectory.

And now, in these exciting times, the only intelligence station of the desperate Cubans left unsealed by Colonel Herrera's vigilance was useless to all the friends of liberty, whether within or without the lines!

"He can tell me nothing; some great design may fail through his mental aberration, and, if he dies, I may lose forever the story of Mercedes Agramonte.

All the next three days, by the bedside of the young captain of irregulars, the sacristan and priest anxiously relieved each other. The swarming police spies hovered without, and the sole barrier between the inmates of the rectory and a shameful death was the frail lock of the priest's private oratory and the fear of a further sacrilege. Even by stealth, Domingo and his master dared not go out and seek the drugs and remedies needed for the severely wounded youth.

Well they knew that every spy in the three towns was now eager to earn the reward of five hundred Alfonsos now posted for the body, dead or alive, of the wounded Cuban spy, who had been discovered hiding between some cars on a side Y of the military road.

Trained to dissimulation, however, by the sad creed of war, and a life spent under the tyranny of Spanish officials, the padre calmly received the profuse apologies of Colonel Herrera and the administrador on their formal visit, when the excitement had somewhat subsided. His faded eye never drooped when Colonel Herrera spoke of the tell-tale blood stains leading only in one direction.

"It may be so, señor colonel," placidly answered the priest. "I saw nothing of these blood stains. As you remember, it rained heavily all the night after the shooting, and I presume that both the incoming and outgoing marks are now gone! And, besides, a mob of a thousand have trampled my poor gardens into a brickyard."

The baffled officials were forced to be mute before this wily answer, and yet, as they drove away, Herrera struck the pommel of his sword in anger. "The old black robe knows something!"

It was true! Padre Ruiz knew of the staggering fugitive crouching on that night in the dim confessional box, while he, kneeling and covering him with his robe, only rose to stand at the door of the little cabinet while the soldiers rushed through the church. It was a frail defense, but it saved a life for Cuba—the shadow of that black robe!

He knew, too, that the blood of the victim had sunk into the porous red tiles of the church floor, and of Domingo's care in effacing the last trace.

"Thank God!" he cried. "There were no papers

on Andrés!" A careful search had revealed nothing, and the poor, gaunt insurgent captain now lay clad in clerical garb. His face had been closely shaven, his locks clipped, and his countryman's disguise was laid away in a niche in the crypt below the high altar.

The useless cartridge belt had been burned, and the tell-tale cartridges all buried deep in the adjoining deserted Campo Santo.

On his knees before the shrine, where, for thirty years, he had prayed for Cuban liberty, the broken old man implored the mercy of God! "If he dies, we may not be able to safely remove the poor hero's body; if he lives, he is locked in a cave of death! We can never get him out of here!" so sadly mused the sorrowing man. "His poor, wounded body closes the last channel left open for Maceo's dispatches, and, my God! what may not be lost while he lies in that dreadful stupor! Discovery means annihilation for all of us!"

The week which passed by in horrible, crawling hours, brought no relief. With an oily politeness, the administrador civil assured the ecclesiastic that he would never be annoyed again by the military. "My chosen men are peaceful, civil, quiet, and sober! You will be relieved soon, my dear padre, from all further anxiety. His Excellency, Governor-General Weyler, is coming himself to make a house-to-house canvass of the three towns! The lurking spy will surely be found, and, then, I can get his order to relax my precautions for your safety!"

With a sinking heart, the priest learned of this im-

pending visit. "We are trapped—doomed—lost!" he moaned, as he tossed upon his sleepless couch that night. And yet he dared make no sign of his inner sorrows!

By noon the next day, the whole lines of Marianao knew that the governor-general, with a brilliant staff of fifty officers, was quartered at El Recreo de las Trés Rosas, on the pleasant heights of Buena Vista, two miles from the church.

The distant clamor of battle was borne back from the front, where three heavy columns were endeavoring to pierce the fastnesses of Pinar del Rio.

The three towns now swarmed with wounded; the shriek of the troop trains resounded and the dead-carts were ever busy in their rough, jolting voyages to the teeming charnel at La Playa.

It was Domingo who warned his master, on his return from a secret medical foraging expedition, that a cordon of trebled pickets had been drawn simultaneously around the three towns of Marianao, Quemados, and Lissa, and that a house-to-house search was going on—the civil inhabitants being forbidden to stir abroad until it was achieved.

Through the streets of Marianao, in the splendor of the setting sun, came the stern dictator riding with an escort of lancers, and followed by a superbly uniformed retinue.

Some vague premonition of suspicion led the padre out to the doors of his church. And there, while the sergeants' squads were rudely rushing through house after house of the pretty town, the old man was forced to si-

lently follow the governor-general in his keen examination of the church interior. Old Domingo led the glittering bevy of staff officers through the various offices and outbuildings, while the fearless priest answered the harsh general's pertinent queries.

It was sword against gown, and the craft of the churchman at last triumphed! But, with a quaking heart, Padre Ruiz gazed at the handsome young colonel, who, from his *précis* book, supplied all the lapses of the great man's memory.

When the general at last mounted his horse and clattered away, Padre Ruiz sank, ashen pale, upon a bench. "Follow—follow on! Hasten, Domingo!" he whispered to his old servitor. "That young man, the colonel, the one who looks like——" but the rest was lost, as the aged priest fell into a deadly swoon, gasping: "It can not be! There are no more of the accursed race!"

The brightest stars on earth shone down that night, as General Weyler lingered at the feast set for him in La Sevilla. He was in an inspirationally happy mood! For three wretched suspects had been dragged forth from hiding, and shot forthwith under the lindens of Marianao.

Colonel Herrera was absent casting the dragnet in Quemados, and Colonel José Gomez was also charged with a careful selection of the doomed ones from the score of poor victims caught in the purlieus of Lissa. "I would shoot about half of them, the dirtiest," blandly said the general to the departing Gomez. "As for the rest, there is room enough in the jail at Lissa. They

can be fusilladed next week! It will keep the example fresh in mind!"

The governor-general smiled as he gazed on the beauty of Señora Juana Agramonte. It had been a masterstroke of Machiavelian policy which had domiciled the petulant Señorita Isabel Fulana at the Recreo de las Rosas, and now that his handsome junior aide and the embarrassing Herrera were busied for a good twenty-four hours, the ruler of Cuba proposed to have a few meaning private words with the woman whose beauty fairly startled him on this soft summer night.

A rifle shot away, the startled priest was studying the features of the sleeping Andrés. "A Spanish colonel of the staff, a stranger to Cuba—it is a wonderful resemblance—and yet, Domingo tells me that this young stranger, Weyler's favorite aide, has been here only a year! Thank God, there can be nothing of the dead past to haunt this poor soul! A hero in rags—a knight of old in a beggar's tatters—hunted like a wounded stag by the scent of his own blood!"

As he leaned tenderly over the young man, Andrés opened his eyes with a first glimmer of returning reason! "Padre! padre!" he whispered, as the old man leaned in ecstasy above him. "I brought the arms in! Our Lone Star is advancing, and Cuba shall be free!" Then, the blessed angels of sleep came and ministered unto him, while Mateo Ruiz fell on his knees thanking God for a life yet spared.

The murmur of angels' wings alone trembled in that holy cell of refuge, as the prayers of the venerable priest faltered from his lips.

It was merry now in Juana Agramonte's boudoir, where Valeriano Weyler, led along by the pride of the eye, the music of a thrilling voice, and the witching presence of the woman who delayed the fatal moment, was dreaming olden dreams in that passing scene so fair.

Under the velvet lashes, the pleading Spanish eyes were fixed upon him, and the careless touch of Juana's rounded arm drew away the crafty schemes for a moment from his spider web.

"How is it that your beauty was veiled from me so long, *mi querida?*" the general said, his eye falling before the burning passion of the woman who now fought for life on her own vantage ground.

There were tears, diamond tears, trembling on her fringing lashes as, with a heaving breast, she told all the story of her slavery to Romero Agramonte. "Alone, young, a stranger in a strange land, señor gobernador, I was left in the hands of that cold-hearted miser, Pablo Ortiz! What do we Spanish wives know of laws, of rights, of justice? Here, on this lonely domain, he was my legal master! I was as wax in his hands. And he buried me here—a living corpse!"

"Tell me all, Juana," eagerly cried Weyler, as he drew her head down upon his breast! "On the honor of a Castilian, you shall be sheltered by my name, protected by my sword!"

Their eyes met, the unspoken question was answered, and Juana Agramonte lied for her life, as the trembling Circassian wrenched from the blue Georgian hills, lies,

in wordless passion play, to become the hidden tyrant of a sultan's heart!

It was an hour later in the garden, under the listening roses, that the dictator bethought him of the fair-browed girl prisoned down there in the Visitacion convent! He had in these last days traversed the superb savannahs of La Sevilla, and the archives of the dead Ortiz had given him all the details of the revenues. It was a princely heritage! Here was a golden Atlantis and a guardian angel for the realm!

"Will you give me your life, Juana, for the Crown—for Spain—for myself, if I give you my heart?"

There was the pressure of burning palms, the meeting of fevered lips in answer. "I know that you have told me the truth, and now I tell you that your old enemy will trouble you no more. Pablo Ortiz will never return from Spain!

"There is a girl, the child you told me of—the one who was carried away to Spain! She lives, she is near us now—even here, in Havana! The church has a long memory, and I dare not hide her forever! But," he whispered, "she knows nothing! She is alien to your blood—to mine!

"You shall live and die mistress of La Sevilla—you shall be a secret queen in Havana—you shall rule my heart—if you will only do my bidding!"

The head of the dancer was now resting on his bosom and he read the answer in her eyes.

"Herrera!" she whispered. "I fear him!" Her faltering whisper was smothered in a storm of kisses.

"He is my creature!" cried Weyler. "You are

sacred to me from this moment! I will send him away to Santiago, thence he shall go on to Spain on recruiting duty!

“I will place young Gomez here in command, and to shield us from these lying creole tongues, I will send to you a trusted friend, a woman of rank, to remain here with this girl. I dare not brave the church too far! She is my devoted slave; we will easily outwit the covetous church, for you shall be my hidden queen! Old Agramonte was a Cuban cur—his first wife of the same traitor blood. This callow girl is of the rebel spawn. Will you divide with me this great domain? Rule my life—be my queen!”

The stars looked down upon their guilty compact, and, with murmuring vows, as she lay in his arms, they plotted the ruin of the bright-hearted girl, who slept that night the deep, pure sleep of innocence!

Weyler went happily away, musing: “I alone know the history; the priests are baffled, the others are all dead!” mused the general, as he rode away to Buena Vista. “The stake is three millions! With this woman I can win! The game is on, and I have taken the first trick!” He laughed as he rode along. “After all, she can only turn the girl over to my fancy! They are both in my power!”

CHAPTER VIII.

DOWN IN CABAÑAS PRISON. "WHO ARE YOU?"

The lines of Marianao quivered under the unceasing gadfly attacks of the Cuban insurgents in the long months which followed the secret compact between Don Valeriano Weyler and the now reckless mistress of La Sevilla.

The summer rains were ceasing and the bare zone of death between the lines was marked no more by the red fires of war! There was nothing left to burn!

From sheer self-protection, the burly spider of Havana had been forced to throw out a chain of strong battalions five miles beyond his barbed-wire trocha and his bristling advanced rifle-pits! The reconcentrado zone was now only Aceldama—a field of blood; Golgotha, a place of skulls—for the sword had swept off all the arms-bearing men—starvation had carried away the ghastly-eyed women and the plaintive, hollow-cheeked children.

The mask had now been dropped by both sides. There was no black flag carried by either royalist or insurgent, but the black heart guided the bloody hand! The absence of the wary Colonel Herrera was deplored by the suffering troops, for Colonel José Gomez, the new commander of the lines, had found a daily task

of special duty lingering at the feet of fair Señorita Isabel Fulana, still queening it at Buena Vista.

Murmurs and mutinies now filed the land. The Spanish flag was going backward! Even in Havana, the fierce "peninsulares" growled at Weyler's continued failures, for even the heaviest columns of Spanish troops failed to reach the hawk's nest, whence the remorseless Antonio Maceo darted down upon unprotected flanks and rear! The buzzards followed the beaten hounds who penetrated Pinar del Rio's gloomy gorges, and stayed to fatten upon the awful harvest of the slain!

Even the boy king, busied with his marbles in the Escorial; the haughty regent, and the grim Council of War in far-away Madrid, knew now that Weyler's heavy flail only beat the empty air!

The enraged governor-general now made his headquarters at La Sevilla for half the sultry summer days, urging to the front crowded trainloads of his unwilling conscript victims! The cuartel general was located down in Quemados, but the blue and silver of the Spanish lancers guarded the beautiful oasis of La Sevilla, the one green spot in all this red wreck of war! No one now left the sheltering lines of the blockhouses around the triune towns, for some mystic influence seemed to divulge all the sly plans which were made only by the governor-general and his chief of staff, José Gomez. And yet these plans all failed!

"It is beyond all reason," raged Weyler. "I give Gomez his secret orders here—only here. He is true—

that I can swear to! Fear alone would keep him faithful! He saw that fool Ortiz die—it was an object-lesson not to be lost! I am true to Spain, Valga me Dios, and besides us, there is only the household!”

As the general spoke, his eyes fell upon the pale, proud face of the orphaned girl, Mercedes Agramonte, seated submissively at the side of Señora Juana Agramonte, and that stately dame, Donna Dolores de Valmasida, whom Juana knew but too well, now was Valeriano Weyler's keeper of the Castle Perilous.

When, a week after the entente cordiale between the governor-general and the lady of La Sevilla, Señora de Valmaseda had arrived at La Sevilla with the fair young prisoner of the Visitacion convent, there was not an eyebrow lifted in the three towns.

Fear kept all aloof from the dangerous presence of the dictator, and the “gente fina” were all scattered. The rich had refuged in either of two continents—the “*oficiales*” kept their distance perforce, and the “*hoi polloi*” thanked God for the distance, which in this case left no enchantment.

Havana province, “from olden usage,” accepted the ambulatory court of the governor-general without a query! It had been ever the same—the great Concha—Martinez Campos, the courtly—Weyler, and all their other rulers, whether king, stork, or log, possessed a plenitude of “nieces,” “cousins,” and women “relatives,” all strangely fair to view, and very few of these stricken in years!

Trade paralyzed, agriculture dead, the shop empty,

the mart idle, from Havana to Santiago, from Matanzas to Cienfuegos, all waited "beneath the furnace blast," for the final crash of the pine against the palm.

"Los Yankees" seemed, to friend and foe alike now, to be the only barrier between the unhappy people of the "siempre fiel isla de Cuba" and an utter annihilation!

Withal, terror stalked abroad, rapine ruled by day and murder by night! The half-starved soldiery lived on the spoil of the land or the crumbs of their thieving officers, and the gilded aristocrats of Weyler's prætorian guards ravaged the family circle and turned night into day over the dice-box and the wine-cup.

In fetid Havana, the slimy crabs of corruption, the cormorants of commerce, craftily divided their robberies with the officials, while an army without courage, purpose, or hope was driven to the front, but scantily furnished forth, to die under the remorseless machete, or else writhe in the agonies of "el vomito."

And yet, the pompous dispatches of Valeriano Weyler were weekly cabled to Spain—"The pacification is progressing." It was the peace of death, the truce of the grave, the mute armistice of annihilation!

Señora de Valmasida had easily dropped into her rôle of running mate to Juana Agramonte. While the tide of mad revel ran high around Marianao, the swimming sea of superb luxury quietly mantled in sapphire and gold around La Sevilla.

And yet, as the governor-general eyed the three ladies upon the porch on this summer afternoon, he blushed to own that he dared not face the clear, honest

eyes of the slim stranger, the simple, convent-bred girl, who, even yet, was ignorant of her rights as the legal heiress of the only flourishing plantation left in Havana province.

It had been a marvelously well adjusted scheme! Once a week the Lady Superioress of the Visitacion convent came out, drawn by her ambling mules, to visit "her dear pupil!" The Bishop of Havana had reported, "after due inquiry," that he was uncertain whether the putative Mercedes Agramonte was not, after all, only the natural daughter of the dead administrador civil, who had given her the name of "Dolores Perez," a collateral family name of his own. *Inter arma silent leges*. The hungry lawyers, the club circles, the sly bankers, the crouching jackals of the press were all silent, and so, there was no voice of the past to awaken any lingering childish memories in the breast of Mercedes Agramonte.

A daily report of the watchful Señora Valmaseda, the heart confidences of Juana, and an examination of all the unsuspecting girl's letters to her far-away American schoolmates proved her pure mind to be as unruffled as "still St. Mary's lake, where the swan floats double—swan and shadow."

The chains which bound Weyler to the prehensile Juana were forged heavier daily by the artfully hidden intercourse. The possession of the estate was undisturbed, and the one lurking danger, the omniscient Church, seemed to be now fenced off by the double spies hovering around the young heiress.

Unmoved by the horrors of the distant war, Mercedes Agramonte walked around the paradise of La Sevilla, a Una among the lions—"the world forgetting, by the world forgot."

"I am as yet no nearer the legal title," growled the impatient Weyler. "I was a fool to bring her here." And yet he reflected that if he had not toted the child on from New York, time would have, in some strange revenge, revealed to her the story of the waiting wealth!

"I must get this place into my hands," he growled. "What if I marry her to Gomez! And then, send him away to Spain—well rewarded! The old arrears to the Crown could be brought up in court and I could condemn the estate!"

Then the fascinating shape of Juana rose up before his eyes. "She would soon know all! God knows what her craft may lead her to!" He decided to wait, for Juana Agramonte was now his keenest spy, trying to unearth the secret of the local junta of insurgents, who still defied him. For, though none could come in or out of the lines, his baffled plans told him of enemies within the gates.

The wounded Cuban spy had never been apprehended, and even the tireless Administrador Alvarado owned that old Padre Ruiz had foiled him! The severe face of the priest rose up before the altar in the old church—the straggling black-robed women still haunted the deserted church, and the civil police, keenly guarding the "iglesia" and the Campo Santo, reported no suspicious prowling around the suspected locality!

The hospitalities of the administrador and even the governor-general's adroit courtesies were all coldly repelled by the astute old man, who artfully kept the shadow of the cross between him and his enemies.

Only the old padre and this delicate girl, seated there on the portico, had managed to keep out of the reach of Weyler's spies, and a sudden thought possessed the dictator as one day he saw the black-robed Mercedes move away toward the church, with a sturdy serving-woman in her train. The fan and prayer-book told of her destination—the fair face was hidden by the fringing mantilla.

The uneasy general rose, and, bidding Señora Valmaseda follow him, he walked down into the garden, with a significant glance to Juana, swinging there in her hammock, a vision of Sevillian beauty.

In the leafy retreat, Valeriano Weyler gazed fixedly at the woman of fifty whose rich dark eyes alone spoke of a beauty long fled.

"Dolores," he kindly said, "you and I have been friends since I was the penniless lieutenant, and you the star of Havana! In all this hell on earth, I trust only you!" The duenna choked back a sob for her lost youth.

"Tell me," he earnestly said, "what manner of child is this?"

"She is a sealed book, Valeriano," earnestly said Dolores. "Juana she seems to instinctively dislike! I have noted her quiet avoidance. To me, she is ever the same—gentle, quiet, and yet unapproachable. Her

daily books, of course, are in the language I read not. Her letters you all see; her occupations are her birds, the flowers, her music, her painting, her reading, and withal, she keeps up a proud reserve that I dare not break in upon. Only the Church, the Church, always the Church, is her passion! Twice a day always does she go to the croaking old padre over there! She labors at the altar; she has re-dressed all the shrines; she goes to confession weekly, and hardly a day but that old Inez does not carry a huge basket laden with delicacies over to the padre. I have been afraid for her going out at night, but the police, of course, know them both!"

"How—she goes out at night?" cried the startled general.

"Often," placidly answered Dolores, smoothing down her silk gown with her plump hands, sparkling with diamonds. "You are always busied with Juana," she faltered, "and I have no power over her!"

The man who trusted at heart no human being was now thrilling with a new suspicion.

"Damnation!" he cried, "I must look into this! Tell me, is there no sleek young neophyte, no lingering gallant, no smooth-faced young clerical voluptuary, over there?"

"Only poor old Domingo and the grizzled padre," laughed Dolores. "A weather-beaten Don Juan and a moribund Leporello, both of them on the edge of their graves!"

Weyler stooped and kissed the hand of his love of the bygone years! "Watch her," he whispered. "She is

Cuban born, Cuban blood, she bears a Cuban heart! If the young monkey masquerades under a guise of piety, then you must detect her! You are not too old to wear a diamond necklace! Not a word of this to Juana!"

"Trust to me, Valeriano," sighed the duenna, as Weyler lit a cigar and walked rapidly away, leaving the now anxious woman to a host of new imaginings.

"Perhaps," she murmured, "in far-off America, among the 'hereticos' she may have learned deceit."

Whereat certain twinges of conscience brought back her own precocious youthful days. "No one knows in how many ways a Spanish woman can deceive!" she murmured, as she plucked a rose, and sauntered up to the now deserted portico.

It was three days after when Dolores was enabled to whisper to the general that Inez, the self-constituted attendant of the young heiress, was the widow of a Cuban insurgent, who had been killed two seasons before. "This is the beginning of the necklace," laughed Weyler, as he drew a rich ring from his finger. "Watch the pretty dove! Do not disturb her! Let her go out as she will!"

That night, Colonel José Gomez sat late, receiving certain confidential instructions from his chief at Buena Vista, and the sparkling-eyed señorita, Isabel Fulana, blessed the happy chance which had brought her princely lover back to her in such a high good humor. He had stolen away from "his duties" at La Sevilla to lay a little snare, all of his own devising.

The governor-general merrily noted next day an old

beggar woman who skillfully stole along after Señorita Mercedes Agramonte and her attendant maid, as they wended their way to the two o'clock mass of the fiesta! In godless, loveless, heartless, hopeless Cuba, every other day is Sunday, or a "grande fiesta."

Three times a day Colonel José Gomez now paused, on his half-Arab barb, to exchange a few words with the old beggar woman, who had found a little lair in the one long street whence the church door could be seen.

And General Valeriano Weyler at the table now keenly watched the blooming roses of the young girl's cheeks deepen daily. "Is that only Cuba's balmy air?" he murmured. His practiced eyes caught the fluttering signal flags of love!

It was at the vesper hour, a week later, when Mercedes Agramonte stole quietly into the little sacristy of the church, with her little hands straining at a heavy basket. The brown-skinned maid, kneeling before the nearest altar, knelt in an agony of prayer. Without, only the tramp of the police or the cries of the street venders disturbed the brooding silence.

"Come, my daughter!" whispered Padre Ruiz, "the way is open now! I will follow!"

And up the stairway into the loft the light-footed maiden sprang, blushing as old Domingo smiled, standing there ready to wheel the movable altar against the unmasked door. Mercedes' Cuban heart had awakened!

When Padre Ruiz entered the little attic, Andrés Gomez and Mercedes were seated, hand-in-hand, their

young eyes meeting in the sweet ecstasy of a first love.

"Is it for to-night?" gravely asked the priest. "Yes," resolutely answered Andrés. "Mercedes has brought me here the servant's clothes—the passport is ready—the carriage will be waiting under Buena Vista hill, to-night at ten o'clock! There is no moon!

"The boat will lie off the Maquina wharf, and a man waits at Domingues' house in Havana to take me to it. Once on the steamer 'La Aguila,' the Scotch engineer will put me down in the fireroom. There are to be clothes on the boat! I will throw the womanish disguise overboard!"

The old priest's voice was solemn in its accents as he said: "Kneel down, my children! Let me bless you!" When the lovers rose, Padre Ruiz seized a hand of each! "Say *adios*, now! I will leave you—for to-night—there must be not a moment's delay! Once that you pass the town limits, you are safe, Andrés; but, delay not an instant, to-night! I will return and give you, Andrés, my last advice! Remember my signal! Three light raps below!"

Around the two orphans hovered God's angels as they murmured their loving farewell. Andrés Gomez, in his plain garb of the student, was now pale-faced, but his manly figure belied the sombre hue of the ecclesiastic.

Strength and vigor had returned, and all a lover's light shone in his burning eyes! "You have saved my life, beloved Mercedes," he fondly whispered. "I go only to claim you when the Lone Star flies in triumph over Havana!"

"Ah! God!" cried Mercedes, "There is the dangerous path—the sea—the exile—the return—the battle-field!"

"God will bring me back to you," he cried. "Life has brought us together, not death! You are my other heart, my other soul!"

While they murmured the last pledges of a deathless love, below, in the church door, the old priest eyed the beggar woman, who now strangely haunted his door. "Poor old crone," he muttered, "You are poorer than I," and he drew out his last peso to place in her wrinkled hand.

"May God reward you," croaked the old woman, as the priest, startled by the declining sun, went back into the church. In five minutes, the graceful form of Mercedes Agramonte appeared at the open door.

Standing there, in the flush of her beauty, the maiden of nineteen was a marvel of witching beauty.

Tall and slender, her wistful eyes shone with the fawn's innocent glance, her dark hair veiled a brow serene and unshadowed by sin; her delicate lips were moving still on a prayer for the gallant soldier for whose life she was now risking her own.

Behind her, walked Inez, whose face darkened as the old hag stretched out her hand for an alms.

"It is bad luck!" she murmured. "My God! if we should fail—then—death alone awaits us both!" They were in the tiger's jaws!

But, serene and stately, the young goddess walked swiftly down the street where peon and soldier, officer

and smug shopkeeper gazed reverently at the Rose of Marianao! For who there did not now know the angel of the poor!

The fair girl passed on, her heart beating high with love and hope! "It is the day of all days for the escape. The general is absent for three days at Pinar del Rio; it is the darkest night of the month; the steamer with one trusted friend; our faithful allies in Havana are all ready! No! There can be no failure now!"

And so in the golden sunset she saw only the promise of God's mercy and a happy sunrise; knowing of Andrés' final release from his long imprisonment.

A messenger was to bring back to Padre Ruiz the news of the passing out beyond Morro's guns of the hero of her girlish heart.

For, love had drawn her to the altar of the church; the old priest had trusted to her innocent soul; for he had found an ardent Cuban heart beating in the breast of the beautiful orphan.

The story of her lonely girlhood, gained in the confessional, had unlocked the old man's heart, and he easily fathomed the design of the governor-general. To gain by a marriage with some minion, or a compliant relative, the control of the vast estates of La Sevilla!

Long had the priest pondered before he brought the young people together; but, Cuba's cause prevailed, and—in the face of impending death—the flower of love had blossomed. "Remember, my daughter," he had said with pride, "not even the butcher, Weyler, dare tear you from my altar! The Bishop of Havana has told me

that, as an orphan, you are a ward of the church, and—here—at the shrine of the Blessed Virgin is your one refuge and your only safeguard! Inez, faithful heart, will warn me of any danger!” And Mercedes had become a heroine for love’s sake! There she could defy even Weyler! It was, indeed, through the innocent hands of the Rose of Marianao that all the deadliest secrets of the hidden local junta now reached the struggling heroes in the far-away blue hills of Pinar! Mercedes and her maid were Maceo’s last trusted spies. Inez Ortega laughed, in a bitter triumph, when, at night, she would steal out from Valeriano Weyler’s love retreat and then bear away to the swarming human hive of Lissa, the ciphers which baffled every move of the infuriated general!

Behind his chair at table--listening at every door--the barefooted Cuban mozos and soft-eyed waiting girls secretly watched their haughty enemy; and Inez nightly sallied forth, unscathed, a humble courier, to revenge the man who had fallen before the merciless Spanish rifles!

And, on this night of nights, she would seal her final triumphant revenge accomplished. The underground railroad would be safely cleared away at last! For Padre Ruiz had secretly conveyed all the incriminating weapons into the crypt below, and walled them up with Domingo’s aid; a serving boy was to sleep above in the attic; and then, the searchers would be welcome at the open door. The new meeting place was to be the common gathering-place at the water fountains near Lissa.

There would be nothing left to incriminate anyone in the church. Prudence had already devised other meeting places for the secret junta of Cuban sympathizers. On the street; at the market; on the railway; and by dint of innocent visits to Havana they passed from mouth to mouth their dangerous secrets. And Inez would safely pass them on!

When the distant sentinels called off the hour of ten, with a wildly beating heart, Mercedes Agramonte stole along the main street of Marianao, followed by her tall, rawboned waiting-woman, Inez, the brave go-between of the rebels. Neither the graceful girl nor the tall half-breed widow saw the lurking form of the beggar woman hobbling along in the shadows behind them. But, the old spy was eager for Weyler's gold! "Aha! There is a little plot here," chuckled the hag.

"Wait for me here, Inez," whispered the frightened girl, as she pushed her maid into a dark angle of the old church portico. "Follow me home, without a word, after he leaves me," faltered the gallant orphan girl, who boldly risked her life to save the wounded spy—the daring soldier of the Lone Star! Mercedes stole alone into the darkened church, passing the guard-lines of the police without raising her head.

In five minutes she returned, followed by a peasant woman bearing a bundle. Out into the darkness they passed, crossing the street and rapidly turning a corner to the eastward.

There, in the shadows, the disguised soldier bent his head down and passionately kissed the girl's lips. It

was love's fatal imprudence. "For God ; for Cuba ; for our love, darling ! Go ! Andrés," she whispered, as with resolute hands she pushed him forward. "Hasten, my beloved ; not a moment can you wait !"

With her trembling finger, she traced the sign of the cross on his forehead, and then, kissing him passionately, fled back along the street to where Inez awaited her.

Their retreating figures were soon lost in the gloom of night. The young soldier darted forward into a cornfield, followed by the crouching beggar woman ; and, as the old police spy cast aside her assumed infirmity, she waved her hand to a dozen horsemen, who swiftly rode out of a side street.

At her side the leader bent down for instructions. "Send your men all round the field," she cried. "He is making for Havana, disguised as a woman ! Gallop down to Colonel Gomez ! Ride for your life !"

In five minutes, Colonel José Gomez was galloping down the Buena Vista road ! His orders were to trap the whole party ! The field was now surrounded by the horsemen, and Colonel Gomez's heart beat in triumph, as he saw the two lights of a carriage waiting there under the hill by the ravine leading out of the field.

In ten minutes, the wild riders were skirting the road, along which the carriage trundled easily. "I will get the whole nest now ; I will soon be a general !" the colonel exulted. He was moving leisurely along when his lieutenant rode out of the cornfield.

"Quick," whispered Gomez. "Dash back to Quemados and telegraph on to the guard at Buena Vista to

arrest every carriage passing down the road! Have a platoon ready; this fellow may be armed and desperate! I will follow on! My revolver shots will bring the men to my aid!"

A league down the road, the lights of Buena Vista shone out, and as the covered carriage crawled slowly along in the darkest shadows an hour later, there was the dash of horsemen, as Colonel Gomez rode up with a triumphant shout.

A brief struggle; the rising and falling of carbine butts, and then, securely tied and gagged, the wounded Andrés was soon lying unconscious from a deep gash in his head, as with the speed of the wind the carriage was driven onward to Havana.

The lieutenant, with a loaded revolver, sat at the side of the unfortunate captive, while Colonel Gomez paused at the Buena Vista telegraph station only to send the welcome news on to his chief at Pinar del Rio.

"Captured man to-night, escaping from Marianao church in the disguise of a peasant woman. Have put guards around La Sevilla, the hacienda, and the church! Will confine prisoner in Cabañas fortress, and to-night personally search him and report to you by telegraph. Señorita Mercedes Agramonte aided the spy to escape."

The very happiest man in Cuba that evening was the governor-general, Don Valeriano Weyler. He laughed merrily as he pinched the pretty ear of Señorita Isabel Fulana. "This is royal news!" he cried. "The old priest's rat's nest was, after all, the storm centre! He shall hang! And, so, Miss Innocence has been cut-

ting up her sly Cuban pranks! Trust to convent-bred simplicity! La Sevilla is mine! By God! I will make the boy a general! I can proceed now and confiscate La Sevilla legally as the forfeit an insurgent! I wonder," he mused, with an artful smile, "if I can introduce this pretty baggage as my niece—in that little Temple of Virtue at Marianao."

He lit a cigar with a sense of delightful ease and comfort. "Next to Antonio Maceo's head, this is the best windfall of fortune that I could hope for!"

While he smilingly watched La Fulana's feet twinkling in the Jota Arragonaise, he gave orders for a special train to be prepared for the daybreak start.

"If the brute talks, I may trap Maceo through him; if he does not, a rawhide lariat twisted with a bayonet will soon choke the truth out of him—then, I'll shoot the rascal!"

Long after midnight, on his knees, Padre Ruiz implored the throne of Grace for the safety of Andrés Gomez, the nameless orphan hero, the fatherless soldier of the Lone Star. "If he gets to New York, he will be able to join the first filibuster party and so reach his friends again in Pinar del Rio mountains. Thank God, all is well!"

And kneeling in her own room, passionately imploring the Blessed Virgin, Mercedes Agramonte, with tear-stained lashes, tremblingly awaited the news of her lover's sailing in safety until the dawn. Alas! For silver-haired priest—for dark-eyed beauty—when each awoke, a regiment of soldiers, in hollow square, surrounded both the hacienda and the old church.

Knots of frightened townsmen gazed from afar at the new warlike demonstration! With pallid lips men whispered, "Who next?" For they knew the axe was soon to fall! And, dumb with agony, the heartbroken old priest knew that his plan had failed. He made ready for death!

There was a night of horror in a lonely cell in Ca-bañas fortress, where Colonel José Gomez had followed in a steam launch, the boat containing the captured youth.

With his own hands, he tore off the clinging garb of womanhood from the manacled prisoner, searching even the last rag of his strange vestments for treasonable matter.

When the light of his dark lantern flashed full in the face of the youth, Colonel Gomez started back in amazement. "My God! Who are you?" he cried. "This is the vengeance of hell itself!" For, the two alien brothers stood face to face—at last. And, far away, Butcher Weyler laughed. "The game is mine! I have the spy now! I will twist his heart out if he does not speak."

CHAPTER IX.

AT THE LISSA BRIDGE. THE TABLES TURNED.

The defiant prisoner gazed in silence upon the young Spanish colonel standing there, resplendent in his rich uniform. There was a grim horror in the lonely cell at the end of the lowest tier of Cabañas dungeon.

Below them the lapping of the waves on the stony crag was only broken by the listless tread of the sentinel. Andrés Gomez well knew why the lonely cell had been selected as his place of future torture. His blood only boiled now to know who had betrayed him. "Inez, the servant, won over by Weyler's gold!" he mused. "Ah! God! What a fate will engulf poor Mercedes, and the dear old Padre!——"

"Tell me your name," sternly said Colonel Gomez. "For God's sake! Speak! Weyler will put you to the question to-morrow!"

Andrés gazed long and earnestly at José, and then, the whole horror of the situation broke slowly upon him.

"Throw me to the sharks waiting under the Cabañas slide, señor," he bitterly said. "I am a captain of Cuban irregulars—a soldier of the Lone Star—and a man who is ready to die for Cuba! Your strangler is ready! I am manacled, and the grim monster sharks wait below! I know how your prison windows open. One poor

wretch who escaped has told us of the horrors of Morro, the hell of Cabañas. I have no name! I never had a father! And, I will die mute!"

"Listen!" cried José, the soldier of the boy king. "You are mine for an hour! By the memory of the past, I swear that I will free you. Come over to us! You shall be a loyal soldier of Spain! The general will send you away to Barcelona—only give over the trade of rebel! If you will not speak, I will tell you I am the son of Calixto Gomez—a loyal Spanish general—who gave up fortune and friends for his sovereign's cause.

"And, by the face you bear, you must be the brother who was driven out of Palo Alto, when the storm of war levelled our home!"

Then all the outraged scorn of Andrés Gomez's soul broke loose in a fury of wild wrath.

Clenching his manacled hands, he told all the shameful story of Calixto Gomez's betrayal of his brethren unto death.

"I am no Gomez!" he cried, with streaming eyes. "I am the son of Manuelita Parédes! Our accursed blood owes one life to Cuba—it shall be mine! Mine to wash away the stain of a father's treachery! Think you how his soldiers died under garrote and machete, cursing the man who sold them to shame! I am Andrés—Andrés, the nameless! No Gomez—Andrés de Parédes!"

The white look of horror had stolen over José Gomez's face! He clasped his brother's manacled hands with

streaming eyes. "And, I, a loyal soldier of Spain, swear that my life shall wash away the stain! Mine alone! You shall live for Cuba! You shall be free! See! Brother! You shall go forth!"

He grasped the enfeebled youth's hands and unlocked the handcuffs with a key chained to the dungeon key which the jailer had given the general's aide.

"Never!" gloomily answered Andrés, as he threw himself down on the rude bed, and covered his face with his hands.

"Listen! Hear me!" cried José, drawing out his loaded pistol. "You shall hear me! I, too, am Manuelita Parédes's son! Her fond breast nourished me, as later, it did you!

"I was educated in the Spanish military schools in an utter ignorance of this horror! My father's death was reported to me as only an untoward event of his diplomatic career!

"Here, on the governor-general's staff I never knew! I never heard! How could I? I am loyal to Spain, as you to the Lone Star flag! Now, by the mother that bore us, I swear that you shall die, in honor—if you will—on the battlefield! Not here—not here—in these gloomy shambles!

"Listen, you will don my uniform! Take my arms—my boat lies under the wall, here, at the lighthouse steps. The passage leads down! I will keep the cloak! There is a steamer leaving here at daybreak. I will put you alongside! I will join you at the steps! The secret of the window is mine! Let me give a life back to

Cuba! And, after that, I swear, even if we meet on the field, it shall be man to man, if you will! Spare my honor, Andrés, my brother!"

"And leave you to be a sacrifice to Weyler's wrath?" answered Andrés, scornfully. "Never!"

"I can avert that," pleaded José! He saw his answer in Andrés's eyes. The young Cuban shook his head mournfully.

"Leave me to my fate," he stubbornly replied, holding out his hands for the handcuffs.

"Now, by the mother who bore us both, I will scatter my brains here, at your feet, if you will not yield! There shall be found one Gomez who is not afraid to die!"

The click of the pistol aroused Andrés, who threw himself into the Spanish officer's arms.

"Brother!" he murmured, "I will take a Cuban's life from you—for our mother's sake!"

In the darkness, when José had turned his flash-lantern, Andrés told of the loyal Scotch engineer, still waiting for him out there, on the steamer, whose huge black hulk threw a dark shadow toward the Maquina wharf.

"There is no time to lose, Andrés," whispered José. "They change the guard at six o'clock! The steamer sails at five!"

With lightning fingers, the change of raiment was soon accomplished. Springing to the window, Colonel José then opened the fatal frame which had so often been swung to allow the dead bodies to be pitched to the hungry sharks below, a sheer descent of seventy feet, with only a ledge here and there for a goat path.

The transformation was now complete.

"Here," whispered José. "The countersign 'Morocco'; the parole, 'Prim'; the field officers' parole, 'Alfonso.' Do not flash the light! Turn to the right! It is one hundred steps down! I will be waiting at the boat before you! I keep my cloak! I will leave these scattered womanly rags as a decoy! Lock the door and push the key into the room through the wicket. Go now! For our mother's sake! Take my pistol! Speak to no one—save to give the countersign!"

The sleepy sentinel lifted his head as the young officer clanked down the hall! From the little guard-room, the guard relief stopped their cards to cast a lazy glance at the handsome staff colonel on his way out—to envy him, his splendor and his rich pickings at Weyler's side.

Within the cell, with a wildly beating heart, Colonel José listened to hear the scream "Alerta!" the sound of shots—perhaps the crack of a suicide's revolver. "*Gracias á Dios!*" he murmured. "It is time!"

Tossing the rejected disguise out of the window he sprang through the aperture where the shimmering bay shone blue against the somber shadows of the night!

In five minutes, the splash of oars was heard under the frowning walls of Cabañas, and, lit by the fierce red eye of Morro's light, the barge sped swiftly on to the "La Aguila," from whose black funnel smoke was already pouring out!

"Here, by the coal barge, brother!" whispered Andrés, as the steamer's sides rose high above them.

"Give me back the passport—keep all the other papers!"

Under the cover of José's cloak, Andrés had slipped off his brother's glittering tunic and trousers! There was but a moment, as the barge grazed the side of the coal hulk. The brawny form of Angus McPherson, the engineer, leaned over the rail of the barge.

"Who's that?" he gruffly cried.

"Do you want any more coal?" was Andrés's answering keyword of the agreed-on challenge.

"Come aboard! Jump into the coal barge! I'll come down to you!" was the reply.

When Andrés released his Spanish brother's hand-grip, he found a heavy purse thrust between his nerveless fingers.

And then, with a "Give way, all!" the boat shot away, as McPherson hauled the exhausted youth through a coal port into his stateroom!

When José's boat reached "La Maquina" wharf he handed the coxswain a silver peso. "Go! Take your men up and give them something to drink!" he said, as he proceeded, when left alone to resume his braided jacket and gold-striped staff trousers.

Bare-headed, grimy with coal and soot, half-dressed, but happy at heart, Andrés Gomez lay locked in the Scotchman's room, as half an hour later the swift "Aguila" swept away seaward, her screw churning up the phosphorescent foam as Morro's baleful red light swept astern!

"Thank God! There is no dispatch-boat lying now

in the harbor!" cried Colonel José, as he hailed a belated carriage returning from depositing a load of all-night revelers home.

When the handsome young colonel arrived at his quarters, he sent his waiting orderly back to Quemados with his charger. "I will have time to look over these papers, to re-arrange my official toilet, take the first train for Marianao, and then, meet the general on his arrival at noon."

With a strange smile, José went to his pistol-case and took out his second pistol. "Andrés, the Cuban spy, my double, took away my other pistol," he murmured. "Thank God, it is as it is! And, where shall we meet again?"

The loyal young soldier was sick at heart with the disclosure of a father's shame!

"It is well!" he sighed. "I must make such a report as I can! Then, to trust to luck—and—my future! With a dishonored name I can only die like a man, fighting under the flag which is honestly mine—the banner of Spain!"

It was in the blazing furnace-heat of high noon that Governor-General Weyler descended at the little railway station at Marianao.

While the huzzas of the obsequious crowd resounded, the general motioned to the pale-faced young chief aide to enter his carriage.

"To the administrador's!" the dictator cried. "Drive quickly!" The few hundred yards were soon traversed, and the general grimly noted the solid lines

of troops surrounding the old church and the dreamy *pasadere* of La Sevilla.

"You made no arrests here, colonel?" he anxiously said.

"I left all for Your Excellency," answered José Gomez, his heart now bounding with secret apprehensions.

"And the spy—you have him, all right?"

There was the flash of white, wolfish teeth, the hardening of the cruel face, the closing of the thin, cruel lips.

"In the question cell at Cabañas Fortress, Your Excellency! Here is the receipt for the prisoner, who declined to give rank or name! I searched him, with my own hands. My orders of commitment were that he is 'incomunicado' to all but Your Excellency personally. I have with me all the articles found upon the suspect!"

Over the breakfast table, Colonel Gomez, in the presence of the sly administrador, related the meagre details of the apprehension of a recently wounded young man, endeavoring, in woman's garb, to escape from the padre's house and church by means of a waiting carriage, and the evident collusion of Señorita Mercedes Agramonte.

"Ah!" joyously exclaimed the governor-general. "Let old Panchita be brought in. I will have to put the screws on this defiant young rebel-spy to make him talk!"

"First, I need to have Panchita's story! Then, Miss Mercedes, the pretty minx, shall tell her tissue of con-

vent-schooled lies—after that—the old fox of a padre!

“I wonder if I dare garrote a priest! I think, Señor Alvarado, he had better be quietly dealt with!”

Both the listeners shuddered, as General Weyler viciously cut the end of a cigar.

The story of Panchita brought a gloomy frown to the governor-general's face, but the leathern-faced old virago clutched a handful of good Spanish gold as she retreated.

“Damn the old priest's slyness!” growled Weyler. “The whole affair has occurred without his church and house, after all! This pretty minx went in without her maid and returned, followed by a woman, apparently her maid! But the old fox of a padre is not liable herein!

“And missy, herself, she will have her story; some altar dresser, some old beneficiary—that will be her explanation. The man disguised in woman's clothes was only caught on the road three hundred varas away. It was a mistake! There is not evidence enough to punish them—to deal with them as I would! I must frighten the girl, and boldly search the old priest's house! When I get him over here, the search shall begin at once! I will now send for the girl and confront the two! Señor Alvarado, do you go down to the church and bring the old man here forthwith under a strong escort!”

The administrador bowed and sped away, with his eyes gleaming in a long deferred triumph.

“I think,” slowly said the governor-general, “that I will use you, my young friend, as an ambassador.

Take my carriage and drive quietly over to La Sevilla! Give my compliments to Señorita Mercedes Agramonte! Bring her here! Stay—she can be accompanied by her maid, Inez! I rely on your prudence! Do not frighten her!”

When the carriage reached the foot of the hill, the young colonel turned and saw a dispatch-bearer wildly spurring his way along to the administrador's mansion.

“The flight is discovered!” he laughed. “And Andrés is now a hundred miles out at sea! I have paid off my father's dishonor! Now to revenge my Cuban mother! This girl shall not suffer!”

He thought now, with a wistful, yearning affection, of the shadow mother whom he had never known, as Andrés, his stranger brother, met in the shadow of death, had painted the dead Manuelita Parédes in the few moments of his passionate revelation in the condemned cell.

Brushing aside the soldiery, Colonel Gomez entered the shaded drawing-room of La Sevilla. There, with blanched faces, Juana Agramonte and Señora de Valmaseda awaited the envoy of the great dictator.

With graceful courtesy, the colonel murmured a few words as to an apprehended attack.

“The governor-general will call and assure himself of your safety, very shortly, ladies,” he apologetically said.

When he had delivered the message of his chief, he awaited, with a beating heart, the arrival of the Rose of Marianao.

When, left alone in the drawing-room, José Gomez raised his eyes, the pale-faced girl who had glided into the room uttered a faint shriek, and then clasped her hands upon her breast! José's quick ear had caught her gasping sob: "My God, Andrés!"

"No! not Andrés—but his Spanish brother José!" he whispered. "Come with me—fear nothing! Andrés is safe—a hundred miles at sea! He was taken. I released him! Remember, we are to be strangers; my life—your life—depends on it! The general will question you. You must know nothing! That is your only answer. And Weyler does not even know Andrés' name. You are safe. Tell your maid the same."

"But the padre—they will kill him!" faltered Mercedes.

"Hasten! Compose yourself! Remember—you know nothing! God will guard your old padre! Weyler dare not kill a priest—not even he! Come, now, come!—and show neither interest nor fear! Our lives depend on that!"

Half an hour later, with a proudly placid face, Mercedes Agramonte came out of the council room where General Weyler, with the administrador, had plied her with questions.

"Either that girl is a narrow-brained, convent fool, or else, the greatest actress I have ever seen!" fiercely cried Weyler to the wondering administrador. "She knows nothing—nothing—nothing! And that blubbing fool of a maid; she, too, is useless to us!"

Inez's stubborn resource of choking sobs and stormy tears, with a half-Indian stolidity, had raised the general's ire to a white heat. "Let them drive home alone, Colonel Gomez!" shouted the infuriated general. "The girl goes back to the Visitacion convent, bag and baggage—that's all! I will telegraph to the Bishop to send up the prioress!"

"Now, sir!" shouted Weyler, throwing an opened dispatch down on the table, "read that! What does that mean?"

Colonel Gomez had been a hundred times under fire and he knew he took his life in his hand when he lifted the paper.

"It means, General," he slowly replied, "that some drunken sentinels have allowed outside friends to aid this fellow to escape! He was manacled, safe and sound, when I left at four-fifty, this morning! I followed out your own orders to the hair!"

Alvarado's face blanched as he read over the ominous lines:

"Prisoner in condemned cell escaped. Window barrier opened from outside. Cell found locked. Handcuffs in cell. Morning guard change discovered flight. Please send orders.

"ORTEGA,

"Commandant, Cabañas."

Weyler sprang to his feet. "Send an orderly on a gallop for a special engine to be made ready! Get over to Morro and Cabañas. See the chief of police and secret service. Give description of the man. Offer a thousand doubloons for him!"

"Put the whole guard relief in the lowest cells on bread and water! Remain at headquarters! I come down to-morrow! Away, now, away—your future depends on it!"

The old veteran's voice was thick with passion!

"You can not blame me, general," steadily said the colonel, meeting his eye without quailing.

"No, no!" hastily retorted the dictator. "Get away and catch him! That's all. Now for the priest! By God! he shall speak! Bring him in!"

Like one who rides for life, Colonel Gomez swept past the window, racing away to the railway station, as Padre Mateo, entering quietly, addressed the arbiter of his fate.

"You have sent for me, Señor General?" he placidly said.

And then, the storm burst upon the unprotected head of the old ecclesiastic. With an unmoved face, Padre Ruiz listened to the rolling up of every accusation suggested by the ingenious civil official.

There was the calm of the martyr upon the old priest's face when he simply said: "I am in your power! Do with me as you will! I have privately notified the Bishop of Havana of your civil police espionage. I have been a virtual prisoner for a month! The outrage is not for me to redress! I leave it for the Bishop!"

"Hark ye, Señor Padre!" growled Weyler, "your den is being searched even now! If there is a scrap of incriminating evidence found, you will die the death of a dog!"

"In any case," soberly answered Padre Mateo, "it is my hour of prayer! If I die, it only shortens my life but a few weary days!" And then drawing forth his breviary, he applied himself to the offices of the Church.

The infuriated man, upon whose coward soul a hundred thousand innocent lives weigh heavily ere the day of judgment, grasped the book and cast it away.

"You have taught this callow girl all the arts of the Cuban rebel—the sleek go-between—the protected woman spy! She is the agent of the throat-cutting insurgents!"

Padre Ruiz rose, picked up his book, and dusted it calmly upon his frayed gown.

"I have taught her, Señor General, the secret of her birth, which has been denied her—the story of her sainted mother's Christian life—the knowledge of her lawful inheritance is hers now!

"And, Señor General, far beyond your power, in the hands of the highest councils of the Church, the story of the robbery of the orphan is recorded! You may not have robbed her—but you now, withhold her rights! The daily riot and revel in her home is shameful—where you make merry with the defrauded orphan's goods! The records of her birth; the story of Pablo Ortiz's desperate villainy, aided by your quondam friend, Señora Agramonte; the means that you have taken to try and involve her as a Cuban suspect, and confiscate her fair inheritance—all this is now far beyond your reach—far over the sea; not alone in America, but, also, in Spain!

“And even though I die here in your shambles, an inquisitor will be named, in time, to right the orphan! You will be called to account! The daughter of the richest hacienda owner in Havana Province has been so far smuggled through life under an assumed name, and pushed from one brief place of rest to another, to suit the schemes of the vile woman whom you have taken into your favor! And even now, while you threaten, the Bishop of Havana knows of your armed desecration of my church! Lead me in chains to him! I dare you to bid me to speak! As for my wretched, lingering life—take it!

“But spare that innocent child! Harm one hair of her head if you dare! There is a higher power than the sword! Even you fear it, Señor General! The hour of my service at the altar approaches! It is my sworn duty to perform it! I go now, and if your soldiery drag me away from there, dead or alive, you answer to the Bishop—for even he, a spiritual lord, dare not support you! Kill one priest! Another will mount the altar steps!”

With a fearless and defiant brow the old man passed out, and betook himself along the dusty road to the solemn labors of his self-devoted life.

“Follow him, Alvarado,” growled Weyler. “We are defeated! Report to me the result of the search of the house by telegraph. Keep the old fool quiet! As for me, I go to Havana!

“And, hark you! Señorita Mercedes and Dolores Valmaseda will leave here to-morrow forever! I have

a good excuse—the boldness of the insurgents' recent attacks! Juana can stay!" he muttered, "for, the devil always takes care of his own!"

As he stepped into his carriage that night, General Weyler ordered off all future surveillance of the church. "The nest is deserted, the birds are flown—of course you found nothing! It has been a clumsy failure, but—I will lay down a heavy hand at Havana! That spy's capture was reported to his friends; the secret insurgents of the city aided his escape; for, damn them, they have money—and that has unlocked the dead man's window of the condemned cell!"

Two months later, La Sevilla was deserted, save for the restless-eyed woman who waited there now for Valeriano Weyler's infrequent visits.

Storm and battle raged along the lines of Marianao—the fierce return of death by the machete being the Cubans' exchange for the Spaniards' platoon volleys. And the reconcentrado zone was now but a wilderness of lonely graves!

Padre Ruiz, seated in his lonely room, mourned, with Domingo, the bright presence of the fair girl who had vanished from their sight. Not even a word from the frightened Bishop ever came to tell where the graceful head of the Rose of Marianao was pillowed.

But one gleam of happiness lit up the old priest's heart. From Inez he had learned that Andrés Gomez had safely passed out into the light far beyond the silver flashing foam of the Antilles.

And, scourging Pinar del Rio, Weyler's forces now

drove the desperate rebels afar, scattering them like chaff, while the insurgents chased the wearied invaders back to their very gates.

One, in the lead of the Spanish forces, ever sought for the death—the happy release of death—due to a son of the dishonored Calixto Gomez. It was the unhappy José, now deserted by fortune.

It was in the early gray of a chilly Cuban morning, in the early fall, when three score of lean Cuban horsemen dashed out upon a tired-out Spanish escort, almost within sight of the Bridge of Lissa. The cracking Mausers were not as quick as the merciless machete, and when their young officer fell, the surviving Spaniards were quickly bound and dragged into the bushes for the stripping naked and the horrid decapitation.

“Leave this officer to me!” shouted Andrés Gomez, as he leaped, pistol in hand, from his horse. “Take that big, black brute away and kill him! He is El Negrito—the hundredfold murderer! As for this fellow, I will kill him with my own hand, after questioning him!”

The tables had turned, and the brothers were face to face in deadly fight at the Lissa Bridge!

BOOK II

HEARTS ARE TRUMPS.

CHAPTER X.

IN HACIENDA LA SEVILLA. THE FACE AT THE WINDOW!

When Captain Andrés Gomez had dragged his wounded brother aside into the dense chaparral, with the aid of his orderly and a couple of file closers, he quickly gave his orders to the two junior officers.

"When you have killed and stripped all these brutes," he cried, "retire your forces and wait for me hidden in La Honda gully. Three hundred of our men will rendezvous there to-night. Be sure to take all the arms and ammunition! Pick up every weapon! We need them! Is El Negrito dead?"

"We are taking his head to show to General Maceo," grimly said the second in command.

"But, what will you do here, Captain? The Spaniards will be pouring out like hornets soon! There goes the alarm-gun at the Lissa Bridge now!"

"I will keep my first platoon," hastily cried Andrés. "Throw off a couple of your saddle hammocks. I will

hide up here in an old cave that I know, put this fellow to the question, and, if I get the Spanish password, I may go into Marianao to-night. Go on; the command will join you at midnight!"

In ten minutes, there was nothing but the stripped and decapitated bodies of the slain Spaniards left, blackening in the wild outpour of the sun's heat, to tell of the fight, and the buzzards faithfully pointed to the column pouring over Lissa Bridge—the spot where the gigantic headless carcass of El Negrito was propped up in the road, with a machete pinning him to a palm tree.

The onrush of the Spanish columns was checked, by a sudden prudence, where the trampled ground showed all the evidences of a desperate conflict.

"Bear off the dead!" gloomily cried Major Valeria. "I will not follow these damned Cuban wolves into the bushes!"

Not a half a mile away, in a gully, where the great springs feeding the three towns gush out, Andrés Gomez was bending over his senseless brother's body! A rough litter made of the two hammocks, with side poles cut with a few machete strokes, had eased the wounded colonel's hasty transportation.

Once within the cave, Andrés gave hasty orders to the horseholders to disappear at once with the animals. "Five of you are enough! Wait with the horses ready for us at El Chorro rock to-night, at ten! We will steal back one by one. Away now! Leave only this Spanish officer's horse and trappings!"

The score of men left were hidden in an ambush

around the mouth of the cave, while Andrés, with Pepe, his orderly, bent over the wounded man.

“Not so bad!” cheerily cried Andrés, as he forced a draught of *aguardiente* between his brother’s lips. “Stunned and bruised, when his horse fell and rolled over him! The glancing machete blow was a cut as he was falling!”

With awakened brotherly love he loosened the colonel’s tunic and found him to be otherwise uninjured.

“See here, Pepe!” sharply cried the captain of irregulars. “Steal down to the wells! Give the Cuban whistle! Some of the water girls are always hanging around there, awaiting our signals! Your sweethearts, a dozen of them, are surely there. I must get word to Inez to come out here with help and carry away this wounded man! She can be back here with help by dark, and we can hide within range till his friends take him safely away. Tell her that I am here and will meet her. Let her give the signal three times! She must bring some ‘mozos’ from the hacienda—no lovesick Spanish soldiers! Can you do this?”

“I can steal through the Spanish lines by day! I never failed, Captain!” proudly cried Pepe, as he plunged into the chaparral.

“A life for a life!” murmured Andrés, as he soaked his handkerchief from the cool canteen just brought him, and laid it on the wounded man’s brow.

In half an hour, to the inexpressible delight of Andrés, Colonel José slowly faltered, “Where am I?”

Even in the darkness of the cave, the stricken soldier recognized the loving voice. "Hush, José! We must whisper! My men may overhear! Listen! I will save your life! You shall be taken back to your lines! My God! what a war! Brother against brother!"

Kneeling at his wounded brother's side, as the hours slowly passed away, Andrés learned of the whole story of the governor-general's wily plan to ruin Mercedes Agramonte.

Without, there was no sound as the fierce sun slanted to the west to indicate that a score of desperate men lay ambushed in the cave, which had an entrance into another cleft in the rifted limestone leading toward El Chorro rock.

The adventurous Pepe had glided back, even enticing a couple of village maids to bring up a water jar and a basket of tortillas, into the bushes where, one by one, the ambushed men stole down to break their fast.

Three pickets, stealing through the underbrush, had already reported the arrival of carts to drag away the bodies of the slain in the high road, and the free rovers of the chapparal breathed easily, as they gained their needed rest.

"The death of El Negrito will keep them within their lines for a day or so, captain," said the wily Pepe. "Then, in a week, they will march a regiment down the 'camino real' for a few miles, kill a few poor wandering beggars, and proudly report 'Another great victory for Spain!' We are safe, but let us get out at dark!"

“For, Carmelita told me, at the well, there are three thousand Spanish troops now encamped at La Sevilla! They are going to make a raid down to San Christobal next week! Let us get out to-night, but come back later, and burn La Sevilla! There is an enormous store of forage and materials gathered all around the old rat-hole!”

To the infinite delight of Andrés, his brother was at last enabled to rise and move slowly around the cave! The long day had been spent in a heart commune in which the two sons of Manuelita Parédes worshiped together the memory of the mother whom neither of them could recall, even in a single glimpse of the beloved face.

“Let there be peace between us, José,” impulsively cried Andrés. “Take this little silver crucifix that Maria Velasco gave to me at New York! Our dead mother gave it to her when she was our childhood nurse! Let us now swear a pact! You can easily get transferred to Santiago or Principe province in the east! Some day the war will be over! Even the yawning grave may find no food, and, if I stay here in the west and you in the east, our souls will be guiltless of a brother’s blood. I know how brave you are! And—I—am also a Parédes,” he sighed.

“You have told me that Weyler has sent Mercedes Agramonte, the woman who saved my life, far away—out of Cuba—to hide her from the clerical friends who would save her inheritance!

“I swear by my mother’s grave that I will find her if

I rove the whole earth over! But not until the flag of Cuba Libre waves in triumph! Ah! brother, would to God that once, by our mother's grave, we could kneel together, and whisper to her, 'Your loving sons are together, heart and hand! We are now quits—a life for a life! You will be conveyed home at dark! I only ask, as a gentleman, a *caballero*, that you will institute no pursuit for twelve hours!'

Colonel José bowed his head and said: "*Mi hermano!* I swear it!"

"I wish you to go away to Santiago," cried Andrés, with gleaming eyes, "for I shall take a bloody vengeance for the betrayal of poor Mercedes! Who was it?"

"Alas! I know not!" sadly answered the colonel. "It is only the accursed greed of gold which urges Weyler on to confiscate La Sevilla! I can now see the whole game! This young girl once complicated with the insurgents, a decree could be signed by Weyler forfeiting the finest estate in the province! Then, through that wily crab Alvarado, it would be bought in for a song!

"Listen, brother," said the colonel. "The governor-general has a hoard of three millions of *pésos* in Spanish gold laid up in secret for his departure! There go the needed sinews of war! Our men are brave and yet half-starved—the whole campaign of Weyler has been a failure.

"He has filled his own coffers, the officials and under-officers steal what they can, and our poor men drop into fever graves, or wither, unfed, in the infected hospi-

tals—if they escape the machete! Be comforted! Weyler will be forced to leave Cuba! Failure stares him in the face!”

“God grant that I may live to find Mercedes!” prayed Andrés, as he grasped his brother’s hand. “Your men are brave and half-starved! Our men are brave, and yet, live like the beasts of the field! Yams, wild plantains, corajo nuts, the palm cabbage, are our only food! Our beds are the noisome chaparral, the fevered swamps, the mudholes, and the sedgy lagoons!”

“It is the sad legacy of our fathers—of that cruel Spain, which has devoured all her colonies,” gloomily cried Colonel José. “Let us respect each other’s honor as soldiers! Andrés, we are quits! A life for a life! I will avoid you! I will leave this human ghoul and seek a distant post! I only live to wash the stain from the name of Gomez with blood loyal to Spain, and, not dishonorable to a man!”

“And I, only live to find out who betrayed that innocent child who risked her life to save mine—to revenge that crime. Then—welcome death—for I shall never see her more!” sighed Andrés.

When the three shrill whistles of the Cuban signal sounded under the hill at nightfall, Andrés stole away for a few whispered words with the faithful Inez! He came bounding back with the leaps of a leopard on the chase.

“Hasten, José! Hasten, brother of my soul! Your skirmishers are entering the glen on the other side!

The water girls were closely followed up. Inez waits below with your horse! Your story is that he dashed off into the chapparal and you were found insensible by a strolling beggar! She will tell her own! Here is the pistol that you gave me on the night I escaped the horrors of Cabañas! And now, *Vayase V. con Dios!* Listen! God be with you! Go! go! We must be soon away!"

A dropping shot in the ravine below now told of the suspicions of the soldiery! Pepe seized the young colonel's hand and tore the weeping brother from his Cuban brother's embrace!

"*Vamonos!*" he cried. "Another ten minutes and, it will be death for all of us!"

Dashing on through the dark, winding cave, Andrés Gomez led his men out to the ravine leading to El Chorro!

With catlike tread, in single file, the insurgents dropped quickly from boulder to boulder, running down the clefted rifts, and in a half hour, had safely regained their own outpost at El Chorro!

From there, the young leader could see the blazing lights of La Sevilla, where Valeriano Weyler gave a feast for the officers who were to lead out on the morrow the strong brigade to San Cristobal!

Already a score of the mounted insurgents had rallied and were busily engaged in dividing the military loot of the Spaniards slain in the day's wild whirl along the lines! Every cadaver left behind had been stripped, even of belts and sandals, for the needs of the Army of Misery.

Pepe came in, breathless, the very last of the insurgent pickets.

"I saw him safely join Inez, captain," whispered Pepe, who had divined the unhappy secret of the fatal brotherhood.

"He is safe! Thank God!" cried Andrés. "For he saved Mercedes from that brute's vile snares! Listen, Pepe! We will gather another hundred of our men, and when the brigade has got two days' march away to the south, we will go in and smoke out the vile rats' nests! I only want volunteers—but, fire and sword shall surely punish these brutes!"

"Right, captain!" fiercely exclaimed Pepe! "Inez has promised to show me a covered way where neither their rapid-fire guns nor rifles can reach us! I know who betrayed you and the dear girl at the church!

"It was that handsome devil, Juana Agramonte—Weyler's mistress—the serpent—who had Inez followed, and put spies on the young lady going to and from the church.

"Old Panchita, the beggar queen, has been spending broad doubloons, and laughing over her three liberal paymasters—the governor-general, the administrador, and the woman who has robbed this poor orphan girl!"

"*Hasta luego! Hasta luego!*" shouted Andrés, as he leaped into the saddle. "It shall be so! Come on, men! We must be twenty leagues away at dawn!"

The fierce thirst for revenge now burned in his veins, for Pepe had told him of the "dead angle" through which a body of men could reach the mansion of the

administrador, and then the shaded gardens where Juana's lovers had waited for her in her varying moods.

But one seed of all Weyler's planting had borne the bitterest fruit! Mercedes Agramonte had disappeared, leaving no trace! It was the faithful Inez who had given the young captain the old man's message. "They have taken her away forever. Perhaps to old Spain! None of the clergy know, and our secret friends in New York have written and telegraphed the same to Padre Villareal.

"For us, for Cuba, for our cause, she has sacrificed her liberty forever!"

These words had roused the sleeping tiger in Andrés Gomez's heart. A desperate thought possessed him after Pepe's recital of the little refuge under the lines of Marianao, left by the hasty Spanish engineers—the dead angle—which led up to the house of the administrador.

In the long hours of the three days, while Pepe, the scout, carefully reconnoitred the ravine of the water wells, exchanging his local knowledge with that of Inez, Captain Andrés Gomez formulated every detail of his plan of revenge!

He carefully selected one company of the three under his command and arrayed them from head to foot in the uniforms and accoutrements of the dead Spaniards, taken from the reserve store in the cave at El Chorro.

Caps, guidons, guns, belts, the cockades, and medals of the dead, all went to make up the verisimilitude of a company of Spanish light infantry.

While Andrés conferred with his two junior captains

and arranged every detail, the company of disguised insurgents practiced every movement of the Spanish drill and guard ceremonies under their sergeants and corporals.

Four days after the San Cristobal expedition had sallied out, there was high revel in Marianao, for rumors of brilliant successes had been sent back from the front!

It was after midnight when the last lights went out in the mansion of the administrador and in La Sevilla; only the rose-colored lights from Juana Agramonte's boudoir gleamed out to the west.

The platoon of Spanish guard in the leafy gardens had joined in the revel of the town, and only a faint halloo could be heard now and then, wafted up from the distant dancing halls of Marianao.

It was on the little plateau above the wells that Andrés Gomez left his company to give his last instructions to Pepe, now arrayed as a sergeant of the Spanish Valencia regiment! The dozen men of Pepe's detached guard leaned upon their muskets and stolidly awaited their chief's orders by the silent-drill system.

Andrés, in full Spanish regalia, was the very picture of his gallant brother!

"Thank God, José is at Havana!" ejaculated Andrés, as he unsheathed his sword. "Remember, you march straight on the administrador's house! Pick up the first sentinel! Make your rounds! I will give you fifteen minutes after you strike the wall! You are to do your work and then, breaking ranks, clear out

beyond the ravine, and cover our retreat from the rocky ledges around the cave! Remember, every man who loses his way rallies at El Chorro! Not a man is to turn back to help me! I will lead the men out!"

As a shooting star trailed down the blue-black sky, Andrés waved his sword to his men, for Pepe's forlorn hope had already disappeared in the darkness!

In column of fours the disguised "mambys" boldly crossed the *sabaneta*, until the angle of the inclosure of La Sevilla was reached!

Crouching in open order in two lines behind them, stealing along in the darkest spots, the other two companies of the insurgents glided on in silence.

Armed only with machetes and two revolvers each, they were ready to back up the attack of the leading company.

There was no sound but the distant wail of a night-bird, as Andrés listened to the "Alerta" ringing musically down the line of Spanish sentinels.

Five minutes' breathing spell only had elapsed when the young captain heard the "*Alto! Quien vive?*" ring out from the guardpost at the corner of the administrator's garden.

And then, the nightwind wafter back Pepe's bold reply, "*Amigos! España!*"

"Now!" cried Andrés, "*Vamos adelante!* Remember the cry, '*Bayamo!*' When we retreat, it's every man for himself!"

There were a half-dozen men without muskets at the head and rear of the leading company! Breaking

out from the darkness the desperate man led his column directly toward the huge stacks of forage lining the western walls of La Sevilla!

A little watchfire burned in a gully below, and two sentinels lazily rose as the supposed Spanish column moved directly up to the paseo entrance of the mansion! It was the captain himself who answered the hail, "Valencia regiment!"

"I have a requisition for hay for my men's bivouac," calmly said Andrés, as the two sentinels grounded arms.

In another moment, they were lying on their backs tightly bound, their mouths muffled with a torn serape!

"Quick! Drag them behind the haystacks!" hissed Andrés.

"The countersign or you die!" demanded the leader, with his knife at the first man's throat!

The poor wretch muttered "Barcelona." The gag replaced, the same rough ceremony was repeated with the other.

"Let two men take them to the rear! Spare them! Now, quick! with the haybundles and the fireballs! Go on, and relieve the guard, now!"

Andrés sent on a sergeant's guard, which moved down the west side of the mansion, turning by the east and sweeping around by the south! There was still a brooding silence on the hill at the administrador's mansion.

The company was now divided into four platoons, and Andrés dispatched them after the advance squad,

now picking up the unsuspecting sentinels! "Remember my signal! Two shots from my revolver; then break the windows, throw in the fireballs, and pile up the burning hay at the burst-in doors!"

The crouching machete-and-pistol men had now surrounded the garden once sacred to Juana's lovers!

When the first dusky form appeared on the portico of La Sevilla, having made the round, Andrés drew out his heavy pistol! "For Mercedes's sake!" he cried, as he rapidly pulled the trigger twice!

And then arose a babel of the fiends of hell! The crash of shattered glass, the sound of breaking doors, the shrill yells, "*Bayamo! Bayamo!*" arose on all sides of the lonely hacienda!

In the gardens, the cries of the awakened Spaniards were mingled with the crack! crack! of the revolvers, and the huge haystacks leaped into living flame!

The west wind bore huge tongues of fire sweeping into the opened upper windows of the vast hacienda! The ring of the rifle and flash of the machete told of death's harvest, as the score of poor wretches in the mansion only reached the threshold to fall before the insurgents' murderous frenzy. The interior of the mansion was now a sea of rolling flame!

"There goes the alarm-gun!" shouted Andrés to his bugler, as a deep boom sounded from Lissa bridge!

"Sound the retreat! There is nothing alive in the house now!"

The sharp staccato notes of the Cuban bugle rang out, as Andrés led his four platoons back into the

shadows, far beyond the red glare of the burning stacks!

His clouds of skirmishers lined the clefts and caves of the long ravine, hidden in the darkness, and ready to cover the retreat of the main body!

It was but a hundred yards to the edge of the *sabanéta*, and, already, the clattering hoofs of the Spanish cavalry resounded on the main road!

They were met with a withering fire from the skirmishers hidden behind garden-wall and hedge!

Yells of triumph arose as the horsemen broke and fled, and then, as a great column of fire burst up through the central dome of La Sevilla, there was seen for an instant at an upper window a white-robed form!

Two arms were tossed aloft in agony, and a woman's piercing scream echoed far above the yells of the rebels!

Then, as the roof fell in, and the golden sparks soared skyward, the last lurking machete-man crept down into the glen!

Drums were beating at the head of the high road leading westward from Marianao as a column of hastily roused men boldly dashed out over the sedgy *sabanéta*, where Andrés had posted his four platoons in echelon. Each squad-leader had his separate orders!

The two right platoons fired from the darkness, crashing volleys into the mass of bewildered infantry now stumbling out into the darkness, retiring alternately in rushes of a hundred yards!

The two left platoons, facing northeast, decimated

the main guard, now bravely rallied, and led on by the disgraced officer of the picket lines.

Clearly revealed in the red light, and smitten in flank by the skirmishers in the ravine, these devoted soldiers at last broke and ran, while the skirmishers glided off to the depths of the ravine, racing away like stags for El Chorro!

Sternly defiant, Andrés Gomez, at the head of his rear guard, doubled up with a withering fire the broken troops, pressing out once more on the high road!

It was only when the whole four miles of the lines of Marianao rang with the shrill bugle chorus, and signal lights flashed from the sea to the savannah seven miles away, that the young leader gave the order to disperse!

"Every man for himself! Not another shot!" he cried, and the pursuing brigade, clumsily floundering along in the darkness, found nothing at dawn but their own dead, the harvest of empty cartridge shells, and the blackened ashes of the doomed house where sin had reigned and the wanton beauty had rioted with the orphan's substance!

In the cave leading to the fastnesses of El Chorro, at daybreak, Andrés questioned his lingering subordinates. The three hundred men, save a faithful score of guardsmen, were already a dozen leagues away, hidden in the trackless chaparral.

The story of Pepe was a brief one. "We knifed the sentinels after coming on them as the guard relief. Three men in the rear and three in the front of the house

burst in the doors, and I found Inez's plan of the interior to be correct.

"Alvarado, startled by the noise, rushed to the rear door to escape. His headless body lay across the threshold, when we fled, hearing your signal shots, and fearful of bringing the main guard down on you. The brute died by my own hand!"

Pepe drew his blood-stained machete. "There is the blood of the brute who sent hundreds of victims to the firing squads!

"One of the men brought his head along! When we picked up Inez in hiding at the well, she made him throw it down there, so that the poor villagers can know of our Cuban vengeance on the spoiler of the poor!"

"And—Juana?" said Andrés, with his eyes averted from the reeking machete blade.

Inez, the insurgent woman spy, stood before him. "You must take me away with you into the hills of Pinar del Rio," she faltered, hiding her head in her hands. "Domingo tells me that it was her face which was seen at the window when the roof fell in. He was the last man to leave. He was picking up the arms of the dead sentinels. He saw my cruel mistress for the last time on earth! And I—if I ever returned—they would either crucify me or burn me alive, for—Weyler was her slave." And, so, La Sevilla was left in ashes without a mistress, only the smiling fields to greet the rose of dawn.

The sharp signals of the outlying pickets told of the nearness of the lumbering columns, now vainly beating the bushes for their hidden foe.

"Away!" cried Andrés. "We have struck a blow that will carry dismay even to the iron-hearted Butcher of Havana. There are horses at El Chorro. You, Inez, shall go to hide in our hospital in the hills."

The young leader was the last to leave the rocky ridge which faced the lines of Marianao.

Hidden in a cleft, with his field glasses, he could see the black smoke still rising from the funeral pyre of the woman who would have sold the innocent Mercedes to poverty, death, shame, or trapped her for the Spanish garrote.

"Let us go!" he cried wearily. "All my life now lies behind me. There is but one thing left me now—death on the battlefield."

He had heard with an agonized sinking of the heart that Padre Mateo Ruiz had been transferred from Marianao to Matanzas, and made chaplain of a transport plying with sick and wounded between that port and Barcelona.

The gaunt, hollow-eyed young captain led his lean bloodhounds far away into the blue, unconquered hills.

The last link had been broken which bound him to the old church at Marianao.

Haunted by the tender smile of the woman he loved, he recognized Weyler's vengeance for the priest's skillful secret aid to the children of the Lone Star flag.

Fighting like a wild beast for six months, in the fierce western campaign, Andrés Gomez did not even waste one heart throb when the disgraced and defeated Weyler was ordered back to Spain and threw down the broken truncheon of command.

CHAPTER XI.

AT SANTIAGO! "BROTHERS AFTER ALL!" THE TRUE
STORY OF THE "MAINE" FROM DYING LIPS.

A long year of horror and starvation—of futile chase and bloody battle—the beginning of the approaching death grapple, passed away in lingering scenes of merciless reprisal.

Campos and Weyler had given way to kindly old Blanco, and still, the red glare of burning cane lit up the savannahs.

Far away by the western trocha, the heroic Antonio Maceo had fallen in a doubtful fight, his remains miserably butchered by mongrel hands.

The field glasses, watch, and body plunder of the dead hero alone attested his obscure death. And now, the absence of the lion-hearted leader was felt in the breaking up of the disheartened Cuban bands—an army no longer.

Gold, slyly distributed, began to buy the betrayal of chief after chief; the insurgents were slowly forced back into the mountains; their cause now hopeless and desperate, the Lone Star flag was drooping to its fall.

In the wide zone once held by Andrés Gomez's bold irregulars, the rifles of his men glittered no longer in the moonbeams; the flashing machete shone no more in the sunlight.

Gaunt, famished, devoid of supplies, without medicines, even with their cartridge pouches empty, the few lurking insurgents were now mere bandits without settled military purpose.

Gomez and Garcia were no longer names to conjure with; the Spanish troops were poured out westwardly into Pinar del Rio, and skillful emissaries under Blanco were spread abroad to delude the few still formidable men into a betrayal of Cuba under the guise of pacification and "autonomy." The formidable lines of Marianao were now proof against another bloody dash like Andrés Gomez's assault upon La Sevilla.

One by one, the few survivors of the secret junta of Marianao were singled out for prison or butchery. The angelus still sounded out from the tower of the old church of Marianao; but Domingo, the sacristan, sadly mourned the vanished face of Padre Mateo Ruiz.

There was a stranger ministering now at the deserted altar. Fear, force, and fraud ruled the fever-infected station, where, without the lines, the poor victims of the reconcentrado policy rooted in the now barren fields for ground nuts or the straggling yams. Sown with graves, waste and barren, denuded of its live stock, the once blooming province stretched far off its lonely desolation of silence.

Only the shrieking whistle of the iron-clad train sounded on the air, with the shrill alarum of the weird Spanish bugle as the undertone of a merciless war to the knife.

Old Domingo, bowed and spent with sorrow, waited

in vain for some sign of the existence of his beloved master. As the weary months rolled on, he knew not whether death had overtaken Mateo Ruiz at his post, or the bitter vengeance of Valeriano Weyler had reached him, immuring him in some monastery cell in Spain.

The townsmen still shuddered at the awful vengeance taken by Weyler for Andrés Gomez's mad attack.

Fifty poor wretches, fallen into the drag net after the return of the pursuing columns, had been shot, lined up against the blackened walls of La Sevilla.

But, the vagrant winds had long since scattered beautiful Juana Agramonte's ashes afar, and her quondam lover was now safely over the seas, having borne away his secret hoard of millions, the fruit of starvation and rapine, the price of a generation of Cuban blood.

Those rouleaux of golden *Alfonso*s each represented a starved Spanish soldier's life, and, under a new governor-general, the swarm of official jackals still drank the heart's blood of the Spanish army.

Day by day, Domingo haunted the village wells, and only learned by stealthy whispers of the death of Inez, the faithful woman spy.

Surprised in a hidden hospital of the Cubans, while nursing the wounded, she had died fighting, like a man, by the beds of the helpless, when the Spaniard celebrated his victory by burning all—prisoners, sick and dead—in one huge Moloch fire festival!

But never a word of the fate of the desperate Andrés Gomez reached the faithful old sacristan. A vague rumor that he had gone on a distant personal quest finally reached the old man.

But, whether it was a mission to America, or a quest in search of Garcia or Gomez—whether he sought for Padre Ruiz, or had followed the mysterious path of the Rose of Marianao—no man knew, and the defiles of El Chorro sheltered no longer the reckless partisan and his gaunt brown riders. It was the beginning of the miserable end, and the garrote was ready.

Bleeding Cuba unavailingly stretched its hands to the pitiless heavens imploring aid, and the Star of Hope—the North Star—burning blue and faint, seemed farther off than ever.

Then, a sudden wave of horror swept over the civilized world on a February day of ninety-eight, and old Domingo, on his knees, prayed that the breeze from the north might soon bring the clash of the resounding arms of the avengers of innocent blood.

It was in the middle of the month of May that old Domingo, leisurely divesting himself of his vestments after vespers, was called into the well-remembered room where Padre Mateo Ruiz had so often held secret converse with the friends of Cuba.

A carriage had drawn up before the door of the rectory, and the new priest, Felipe Hinojosa, handed the old man a bulky envelope.

“You are to go to No. 129 Calle de Paula, Havana, and deliver this letter to Señor Benito Rodriguez. Await an answer and bring it back to me.”

The new rector was a swarthy peninsular, a man who kept his own counsel. He tossed a golden *Alfonso* on the table.

"You will need refreshment," he curtly said, as he turned away.

Old Domingo bowed and sought the little room, where, for fifty years, he had harbored himself from the storms of the world.

He donned his black robe, took his hat, knelt down and said a last prayer before the little shrine in his room.

Stealing silently out of the dim old church, he dropped the golden *Alfonso* in the poor-box, an offering of love, and then, bending down made the sign of the cross with the holy water on his withered brow.

"I suppose that I will be relieved soon," he murmured. "Domingo's time has come at last!"

As the carriage rolled along in the dusty streets he turned and cast a loving glance at the old church, fading away in the twilight.

"Gone, all gone," he murmured. "The Padre, beautiful Mercedes, our brave Andrés, all the friends of my youth. War, misery, and woe, the open grave alone are the heritage of unhappy Cuba."

The old sacristan never lifted his head as he was driven along through bands of fierce, armed men. They were now shouting and singing in their drunken frenzy.

"*Muerte á los Americanos! Muerte á los Yankees!*"

For, old Spain had madly thrown the gauntlet down to the young colossus of the North.

But, when the hill was reached overlooking Havana, where Santa Clara, Principe, and San Nazario grinned defiance from the heavy black guns, the driver halted the carriage.

"*Los buques de los Yankees!*" he cried, pointing with his whip.

Far out at sea, in a semicircle of golden light, the masthead-lights of the American blockading fleet glittered, and, with fitful flashes, the searchlights played up and down upon the dark vault of heaven, like giant fingers of living light.

"It is the beginning of the end!" solemnly said Domingo. *Séa por Dios!*" And then they drove slowly down into the darkened city, where the wild red cyclops-eye of the Morro light still burned balefully at the dark entrance of the filth-poisoned harbor.

When the wagon rattled along into the Calle de Paula, old Domingo, with a shudder, gazed out on the blackened waters of the bay.

There a hideous blood-red signal-lantern burned over the twisted and half-submerged wreck of the "Maine"—the horrible sunken coffin of two hundred gallant men.

"God forgive Spain!" murmured Domingo, crossing himself. "This cowardly crime is the shame of the nineteenth century. Spanish honor lies buried in that awful steel coffin!"

"I wonder why he sent me away," mused the old sacristan, as the carriage halted. "Padre Hinojosa seems to be now the guardian of the estate of La Sevilla. The new administrador seems to take his orders in all things.

"I wonder if Weyler left him behind as his secret tool! Poor Mercedes! Poor orphan, deluded, robbed, and hunted from her birthright! If only Andrés had

met her in happier days," he absently dreamed, weaving the possible future of the two orphans as he lifted the knocker of the door. The lonely two-story house seemed to be the haunt of the poorer classes alone.

A repulsive-looking *mozo* opened the door.

"Señor Benito Rodriguez?" demanded the old man.

"Upstairs to the right, first door," gruffly answered the servant, as he dived down into a half-subterranean den.

In ten minutes, the street door was stealthily opened. The driver stolidly held his hand out for the letter handed him by the servant, who muttered:

"Tell Padre Hinojosa it's all right, the old man will stay all night!"

While the wheels rattled away, two brutes, kneeling over the form of the dead sacristan in the death-trap above, were busily looting the few silver coins in his old leather bolsa.

"*Caramba!*" growled the first, as he tore away a silver medal from the poor old victim's pulseless breast. "Who would have thought the old brute had so much blood in him. Come, let us send Fernando up here to clean up the floor!"

And then, leaving the mutilated cadaver to be tossed, under cover of darkness, into the bay, the two murderers departed to make merry over an order for twenty *Alfonsos*, the price of his own blood borne by the poor old man who had long been marked for a secret vengeance.

Two hours later, Padre Hinojosa listened with glee

to the message of the returning driver. Standing before the church, he handed the man a silver *péso*.

"*Bueno!*" he carelessly said. "I'm going to give the old man a long vacation. He needs it!"

When left alone, with a quickened step, the new priest sought the sacristy. Grasping the bulky volume of the parish records, he threw its dog-eared pages open at the earlier dates.

In a moment he had skillfully abstracted a leaf.

"They are not numbered, these pages—no one will ever know. Now, *Señorita Mercedes Agramonte*, here goes your title to *La Sevilla*," he growled. "The old man had to be put out of the way. He was forever poring over these dangerous records."

When he had burned the leaf with the baptismal register of *Mercedes Agramonte*, the artful secret agent of the departed *Weyler* calmly lit a cigar.

"Now, if the transport people have only pushed that tottering old idiot *Mateo Ruiz* overboard, then, *La Sevilla* goes either to us or—the church. If it goes to our friends, it is a fortune; if it goes to the church, we can lease it for a song. It is a good day's work."

And the pitiless midnight stars shone down on the headless body of the poor old sacristan, that night, floating around the tangled wreck of the "*Maine*." *Domingo*, the sacristan, was relieved forever!

Though disgraced, relieved, and sent home to be a living witness of the failure of the futile policy of blood, *Valeriano Weyler* had left behind him his agents of dark intrigue carrying on many a deed without a name, the

most cowardly, being the vengeance upon the old man whose only crime was a suspicion of being a lover of liberty.

While the battle-lanterns of the American fleet shone far out on the blue Caribbean tide off Morro, a hunted, half-starved, and desperate man was slowly making his way down through the wilds of Matanzas, Santa Clara, and Puerto Principe to Santiago de Cuba.

Andrés Gomez, wounded, torn, and battle-scarred, had outlived all his illusions at twenty-three. He saw, at last, the whole hideous sham of the Cuban rising!

A soldier at heart, he revolted at the cold and pitiless murder of a few entrapped Spanish pickets. He knew well enough that the Cubans dared not face the Spaniards in the field as men.

He heard all the growing murmurs of dissension in the ranks of the motley bands, who were merely bandits under the guise of revolution. Their leaders—bah!

Garcia and Gomez were both busied in killing off each other's pretensions. Both had left Antonio Maceo, the heroic black, to be slaughtered without aid! To his shame, Andrés knew that General Garcia could never explain the singular leniency of the Spaniards toward the straw-stuffed lion whom they had captured, feasted, and turned contemptuously loose.

And, "el Chino!" Gomez, the wary old fox—his ablest deeds consisted in evading service as a soldier of fortune, an alien to Cuba—doubted, distrusted, and ever playing his own shifty game.

This was the hollow sham of Cuban patriotism, where

power only meant plunder; patriotism masked cowardice and corruption; and the profession of arms was disgraced by the cold, individual butchery of helpless sentinels, and a few poor out-post prisoners.

Well knowing that the Cubans never struck a line of battle, they did not run away from, Andrés Gomez stumbled along through the west seeking the American lines.

"If they do land," he muttered, "I may die under a flag which bears no stain of foul disgrace."

The vision of Mercedes rose up before him to haunt him.

"Dead, dead, poor child! She, too, who would have gladly died for me," he kissed the little ring which she had given him, and swore to join her in that dim shadow-world of death which rolls around and encompasses all life.

"I will find the Spanish bullet at Santiago to open for me the gates of Paradise," he swore, in his lover's delirium.

"Thank God that Weyler dragged José off to Spain. I shall not die by a brother's hand."

"Poor José! Gallant, game, and loyal! God go with you!" sighed the orphan, as he laid his brows on the drifted forest leaves, to dream of the vanished Mercedes, the sacrifice of innocence, the poor lamb slain for Cuba's hopeless cause.

"They killed her," he growled, as he gripped his heavy machete in his uneasy dream. "And, she died for me, for me alone!"

It was on the night of July first, when Andrés Gomez, revolver in hand, rode cautiously through the underbrush leading to the American lines.

Five gaunt horsemen, their looped-up hats bearing the Cuban star, followed him, with their carbines at a poise.

There were the flashing camp-fires of a victorious army, stretching now from General Calixto Garcia's "prudent health resort," far away to the northwest, on, past the gallant Lawton's heroes of El Caney, and down to where the lion-hearted Joe Wheeler still held the blood-bought slopes of San Juan.

Gliding and slipping around in places of "safe deposit," the thieving Cuban camp-followers gleaned the aftermath of the blood-soaked battlefields.

They were a local wing of those Cuban heroes whose chiefs were feasting on chicken and champagne in New York and Key West—whose "armies" were either hiding on the far-away blue hills with Gomez, or enjoying a good night's rest with the brave Garcia, who had now thrust the whole American army between his five thousand men and any stray Spanish bullet.

Down below in Santiago, the sad-hearted Cervera was getting ready for his self-immolation on the altar of Spanish honor, while General Toral floundered among Blanco's bombastic orders and bent his brows over futile Spanish cablegrams. It was cowardice on the Cuban side, incapacity on the Spanish, and the Americans bravely shedding their blood for a thankless mongrel people.

"Who comes there?" hoarsely cried the sentinel at a picket-post, as Andrés Gomez rode out into the light.

"Cuban officer, with important dispatches for General Wheeler," answered Andrés, riding forward and dismounting as the whole picket-guard sprang to arms.

"Damned suspicious," growled a young lieutenant. "How did you blunder in here?"

"I lost my way," simply replied Andrés.

"I should say you did," vigorously retorted the officer.

"You have been between the lines, and I guess you're the only Cuban who has risked his skin since we landed at Siboney."

After ten minutes' parley, the field officer of the day receipted for and sent on the dispatches.

"I will have to keep you here till I know its all right, young man," growled the old veteran. "You speak English far too well for a born Cuban."

"I was educated in New York," angrily retorted Andrés, dropping his hand on his machete. "And, I did not come here to be insulted."

"Stop this nonsense," gruffly cried an old surgeon, wearing the silver leaves of a lieutenant-colonel. "I have a dying Spanish officer down here in my tent. Come with me, señor. I'll be answerable for him," nodded the doctor. "I need an interpreter on God's work of mercy. The poor fellow wants to communicate."

In the little "first-aid" shelter, down in a hollow behind a natural bomb-proof of overhanging rock, lying

among a dozen badly wounded men, was a young man, whose blue and silver uniform, sadly blood stained, told of the Spanish staff.

"A gallant fellow," muttered the surgeon. "Fought like a lion out in the open. The boys had to pot him, to make his men break."

The remark fell on deaf ears, for Andrés Gomez was now on his knees by the dying man. The rough nurse, who held the lantern, brushed away the mist from his eyes, as Andrés fondly kissed the pallid hands of the wounded man.

"*Madre de Dios! Mi hermano! José,*" he faltered, as he marked the telltale bloodstains on his brother's breast, where still shone the war medals of proud, old Spain.

"This is my brother, Colonel José Gomez, once of General Weyler's staff," whispered Andrés to the startled surgeon.

"How long will he live?"

"I give him half an hour. Be careful," slowly said the surgeon, as he grasped Andrés's arm and drew him from the tent.

"Explain this!" the doctor sternly said. "It's my duty to make you a prisoner!"

"Ah, God! I fought for Cuba, and he for Spain," hoarsely cried Andrés. "We were separated in my infancy, and only have met once on the battlefield, out in the west."

"Hasten, then, señor," solemnly said the surgeon. "The hand of death is upon him. I will give you all the privileges of a gentleman."

There was a dumb agony in the young soldier's face which appealed to the old frontier doctor's frosty heart.

Andrés threw himself down by José, whose eyes feebly gave him a loving welcome. The watchful regular sentinel at the door of the tent turned his head away at the sight of Andrés's inexpressible anguish.

With that mysterious grace of God which often blesses the last half hour, there was a return of strength, and José's trembling lips fell into the musical language of their infancy.

A feeble finger pressure was his only sign of life beyond the silken whisper of the dying!

"You are all right, Andrés *mio*," he murmured. "The war will soon be over. Cervera has no coal; his ships are only half outfitted. Toral will soon let go. It was Linares who would have fought it out! I was beside him."

"A hero," proudly cried Andrés. "They all say so!"

The death-damps were already on José's brow as the surgeon, with infinite skill, raised his head and gave him the last restorative.

"Thank God, I die before I see Spain's flag come down," he gasped.

"Listen, Andrés, there are happy days yet for you. The Yankees will take Cuba, and—never give it up! I followed Weyler back to Spain only to find Padre Mateo Ruiz. Weyler killed them all—he and his agents—but he dared not slay the old priest.

"Ruiz has sent the story of Mercedes to powerful men in the Church. No matter where you are on earth,

they will find you out. Stay here—stay in Havana—the Church will surely find you. Weyler has lost all his power. Beware, however, of his staff—his spies—his old confederates.”

There was a long pause, and again the feeble whisper reached the loving brother's ear.

“Mercedes lives, hidden away somewhere, I know that, and old Ruiz will find her through his friends. You, my brother, will live. Wait for her! Find her!

“As for me—one prayer—one last brotherhood appeal.

“Bury me with my mother. Find out her grave!—you will find it out—for, I have shed all my Gomez blood for Spain, and on my tomb carve only the words, ‘José Parédes—a loyal Spanish soldier.’ Up there, I belong to her. I have no other name now.”

When Andrés's sobs had ceased, José closed his eyes, speaking as if in a dream: “You will avoid Weyler's old friends. Shun all the lonely places. Blanco and Castellanos are both loyal soldiers. But, there is that devil Isabel, Weyler's last mistress! She stayed behind to revenge him and carry out his damnable intrigues.

“It was by her help that the crowning crime was brought about—the crime that lost to Spain her colonies forever. The star of Spain has set! Listen! I will tell you. There was a desperate circle of Weyler's staff officers who made up a secret cabal after his departure. They knew his secret wishes—his mad thirst for vengeance upon the coming Yankees.

“He thought if the ‘Maine’ were blown up that

Blanco and Castellanos would be at once recalled—that he would be sent back at once to Cuba as dictator—and that he could hold Havana and Matanzas provinces against the Yankees, until Germany, Austria, and Italy would interfere—perhaps even France! French capitalists own the Spanish debt!

“There was a little infamous resort, in the suburbs of Havana, out by Vedado, beyond the Santa Clara battery.

“A vile Frenchman kept this, and there the dissolute clubmen of Havana often veiled their wild orgies with degraded women of rank who led double lives.

“Here Isabel, Weyler’s tiger-hearted mistress, made her headquarters after he left, using his gold and the discontented and desperate staff-officers to foment discord and trying to thwart Blanco’s honest plans for autonomy. She wished to see Weyler once more rule the whole of Cuba free-handed, and be his secret queen.

“Desperate woman, desperate devils, all they needed was ready money and skilled help. There is a man in Havana who owns enormous Spanish steamship interests. He was Weyler’s confidant. He saw his own vast business interests doomed to a future ruin.

“Mad and deluded by the lying reports of the strength of our fleet, he supplied the money, and the use of his wharves near the Maquina.

“He wished to bring on a war—to fill his pockets—the fool! All that was needed was an instrument—a skilled diver!

“The so-called wife of the Frenchman—Isabel’s go-

between for her new lovers—seduced the wife of a poor Havana diver. He was inflamed with drink, given a few doubloons, and then, the infamous bargain was soon made. The great merchant gave the shelter of his wharves, a steam launch, and abundant supplies. This he could do with no suspicion.

“Weyler’s ex-staff officers, still powerful, obtained the mines and the needed explosives from the engineers’ arsenal.

“Under pretence of repairs these things were all got together. The final bargain alone remained to be struck.

“Six thousand dollars in Spanish gold was the price of the crowning infamy of our age!

“One thousand was given to the poor dupe’s wife, one thousand more to him, at the den on the Vedado road, on the night before the ‘Maine’ horror.

“Four thousand more was to be paid to the wife on the completion of the deed.

“Ah, God!” groaned José, “I was tempted also! But, I thought only that a riot, a horror, some infamous outrage would occur. They feared me—and so, they sent me away to Santiago here to look over the defences. I would have warned the American authorities, so help me God!

“On the fated night, the merchant’s tug went early up the harbor, towing a small boat with the two weighted and half-submerged contact mines.

“Under cover of the early darkness, the last details were arranged by the inhuman brute and his two companions.

“ Slowly the boat was drifted down, towing the two lever contact mines, as innocent in appearance as buoyed fish nets.

“ Once they were firmly caught on the fore chains of the ‘ Maine,’ the harmless little boat was pulled off beyond the ‘ Alfonso XIII.’ and the ‘ City of Washington.’

“ There was a copper insulated cable strand leading into the boat, in case that the lever contacts failed.

“ The whole world knows the record of that horrible night! It is true that loyal old Blanco and the Spanish government are guiltless of that innocent blood. The murderous legacy of Weyler’s ill-will brought this all about to urge on a *coup d’état*.

“ Ah, Spain, Spain!” groaned the dying man. “ If Cervera had only boldly sailed into Havana; if the whole army had been concentrated around it, with an able general to defend it, there would have been two hundred thousand Yankee graves in front of our lines before the royal flag could have been torn from Morro!”

“ José,” entreated Andrés, “ the miscreants, what became of them?” The dying colonel moved uneasily. “ Landing near Cabañas, the exhausted diver was plied with *aguardiente*. One of the desperadoes who had duped him met him, and he was thrust into Cabañas, where he was beheaded and tossed to the sharks. They feared his disclosures. A captain of the fortress guard told me that the two boatmen divided a few doubloons and were then smuggled off to Santander. This captain was killed here in the first skirmish, the night before the battle of Las Guasimas. He told me on the picket

line that the ravings of the drunken boatman caused him to go out and explore the den at El Vedado. The staff officer had arranged with a friend in Cabañas to put the diver out of the way, and the French restaurateur, himself, died suddenly two months after the 'Maine' explosion. That was Isabel's work, the fiend, but Weyler's mistress now lives in luxury in Havana, and his old staff adherents rally around her. The crime was all in vain. The plot to recall Weyler failed miserably! Spain has lost Cuba, but the death of the victims of the 'Maine' can not be charged to us! This is the truth, so help me God! It was the work of the steamship owner and Weyler's staff."

José lay in a stupor for a half an hour, while the gray-haired surgeon gravely eyed the lone watcher by the dying man.

"Alas, poor Cuba!" feverishly moaned José. "You will be happy with Mercedes, *mi hermano*, but the Yankee will hold your land forever—our unhappy birthplace!

"Your insurrection has only been fomented by a band of rich malcontents secretly stirring up the baser elements. It is the rich against the poor. The sugar and tobacco planters—the lazy loiterers in Paris and New York—the cabals of capitalists at the great Hotel Waldorf—the American journalist pirates—the foreign money lenders.

"We knew well who fed the insurrection with money. We had a bank, shipping houses, countless agents, social spies, and trusty friends watching all the New York intrigues.

“Your ‘Cuba libre’ is a dream, a myth—you have loosened the whirlwind! Can you not see we did not want war! We could have struck a terrific blow in March upon the Yankee coast. Why did we not? We really wanted peace. All their naval bombardment has not silenced a single Spanish battery! We were forced into war by mere pride, against our will,” he groaned. “If the fleet and whole army had been drawn into Matanzas and Havana, we could have held out for five long years. Weyler was a brute, but a good soldier. He would never have given up. You are avenged! He was your bitter enemy. He has lost us Cuba with his useless bloodshed, and the fair island will be the prey of the crafty *Americano*. The American flag will never come down. ‘Cuba libre’ a mockery—there is the hand of fate—that brutal murder of the ‘Maine’ which brought the war on us unawares. We are ruined, and you will be betrayed! And I thank God that I have not lived to see the flag of Spain trailed in the dust!”

There was a sudden rattle of dropping shots. With a last frenzied effort the soldier raised his feeble head, his eyes lit with the battle fire. “Alerta! alerta!” he loudly cried, and then sank back with a feeble moan. “Where’s the light? Andrés! Andrés! Brothers after all!” A fit of choking coughing came on, and Andrés’s hopeless eyes implored the doctor’s aid.

The surgeon sprang to the bedside as the red blood streamed from the sufferer’s open wounds. The sightless eyes were now staring upward, and José Gomez’s hand lay cold and pulseless in his brother’s palm. The Soldier of Spain was mustered out forever!

"There's a Spanish flag under his pillow," sadly said the army doctor. "The boys would not take it from him. Cover him with that. He was as brave a man as ever drew a sword!"

"And, as loyal—God rest his soul!" sobbed Andrés, as he buried his head in his hands.

There were pitying foemen who stood with uncovered heads when José Gomez was laid to rest under the royal palms the next day.

Wrapped in the battle hallowed flag of Spain, the man who had washed out the stain upon his name with his heart's blood slept under the vigil of the gaunt young Cuban soldier who had sheathed his sword forever.

"Free to go, am I?" wearily answered Andrés, when the surgeon told him that his official character had been vouched for. "The whole world is the same to me now. Friendless, penniless, my birthright enjoyed by the stranger, and—Mercedes lost to me!" His brother's hopeful words returned to him. "I will wait until I can lay his bones by our mother's! There is a comrade or two who will help. If the assault is made on Havana I may throw my life away there—as uselessly for Cuba libre, as he laid his own down for Spain!"

Fifteen days later, when the Stars and Stripes were hoisted upon Santiago, Andrés Gomez stood under its protecting folds possessed of nothing but his brother's sword, whereon were carved the royal arms of Spain!

Alone, out there by the royal palms, he sought counsel of the stars as he watched, with chivalrous love, by the grave of the man who had saved him from the hell

of Cabañas, and whose head had lain on his bosom after the fight at Lissa Bridge. He seemed to hear a message in the wailing night winds—a last message from José!

“I will wait until Havana is opened. If there is no siege I may hear from our secret friends some tidings of Padre Mateo Ruiz.

“And if none come to me, then, as a common sailor, I can work my way to New York.

“Perhaps old Maria Velasco still lives at the convent. Failing that—then, I will go to Matanzas and Barcelona to find the old Padre. For, the downfall of Spain may strangely bring the orphan girl back to her own. The Church fears Weyler no more!”

CHAPTER XII.

THE SURRENDER OF HAVANA—SEÑORITA ISABEL MAKES
A PROPOSITION—THE ROSE OF DAWN.

It was the first of January, A.D. 1899. A blazing and merciless sun beat down upon the blue Caribbean, sweltered upon the human wolf den of Havana, and glowed upon the frowning fortresses encircling the bay, where to-day, only one unarmed transport of the King of Spain lay waiting to take away the last Spanish governor-general of Cuba.

There were hundreds of dingy blue uniforms swarming upon the ramparts of Atares, the "invincible"; Yankee bayonets gleamed on the walls of Principe, San Nazario, and Santa Clara; and the grizzled gunners of the Second U. S. Artillery were lounging expectantly behind the ramparts of Morro Castle, Cabañas, and San Diego.

In the whole city, "Spanish honor" had left but one sullen, gleaming, red and yellow banner, mournfully drooping on "Morro," to be the single evidence of the final surrender.

"Spanish honor" had cut away the halliards from flagless Cabañas—in the other forts, the Spanish colors were artfully "lost," and a bare flagstaff at half-past eleven, rose nakedly above the governor-general's palace.

Spanish dignity was avenged by this bit of puerile child's play.

In the great audience room there, Governor-General Castellanos, with misty eyes, realized how deftly the defeated Blanco had fled away, in a hasty resignation, leaving to him the dishonor of giving up the almost invincible lines of Havana and Matanzas with no defence—of tamely surrendering a huge army, supplied for a five years' campaign, and all this, without firing a single shot to defend the boy king's disappearing heritage of the sea. The shame of Bazaine at Metz, was duplicated.

It was the curse of the "Maine" which curdled the manly blood in the Spanish heart.

From daybreak, sullen crowds had gathered all along the city front, from Castle de la Punta to the San José storehouse. The Prado and Plaza de las Armas were now filled with a dense but silent mob, and, long before the fatal hour of noon, every window was filled, every house-top crowded. Women, light of head, cold of heart, in gala dress, smirked at Spain's final disgrace.

The sidewalks were packed with the mongrel dwellers in the Cuban capital—the city was gay with the flag of the American union, and the so-called "colors" of "Cuba libre" now timidly crept out into the unaccustomed sunlight. Even the coward could be brave behind Yankee walls of steel now!

The better residents were all huddled in the dingy interiors of their gloomy houses, and a restless murmur of expectation filled both mart and bazaar. It was the closing scene!

While no cheers rent the air, there was heard along the deserted streets the resounding tread of the victorious army of the United States, bearing before their columns the flag which never goes back. A manly chorus, "On to Havana," was the cadenced rhythm of those marching feet. They had kept their oath!

From Vedado, from Buena Vista, from Marianao, came the blue-clad hosts of "Fitz" Lee, with their bayonets fixed, and gleaming rows of cartridges shining out under the barrels of the Krag-Jorgensens.

It was a visit "in state"—a "morning call"—in return for the jeers which followed General Lee out of Havana when he sailed away with his promise to return sailing over the bodies of our unrevenged dead!

The gallant Virginian had kept his plighted word, and four American major-generals waited before the Hotel Inglaterra to see the United States "officially" call upon Spain, leaving its "carte de visite" in the abandoned throne room of the King of Spain.

On came the marching columns, closing in, ceaselessly moving forward, the dust-brown ranks offering neither jeer nor menace to the impassive multitude, who sullenly gazed without a single welcoming cheer.

The proud "Old Glory" kissed the morning breeze, and beside it was carried, in the heart of every regiment, the flags of States which had once fluttered on opposing battle lines in the old war days when American brothers rended each other's hearts.

An awful hush went over the town as the hour of noon approached. For, the Yankee lines had at last re-

remorselessly closed around the governor-general's palace.

There was a cluster of well-armed Americans at every flagstaff on the King of Spain's strongholds, and in the final quarter of an hour, the last Spanish troops marched out of the governor-general's palace with downcast eyes.

They never saw the steel encircling lines around them, standing at a present, for their eyes were tear-filled, but they vanished in an expectant silence. And so, the slow grinding mills of the gods had finished the grist of four hundred long years of blood and shame.

Down on the Prado, a hundred thousand eyes were bent toward Morro as the cathedral bell sounded the first note of noon.

Suddenly the drooping royal flag slid down from Morro's lofty staff, and then, in an instant, broke out upon Morro and Cabañas the star flag of the free!

A mighty shout rent the air—for all the American soldiers had found their voices—as the strains of the "Star-spangled Banner" were wafted down from the governor-general's palace.

Bowed and broken, the courtly Castellanos left the vice-regal palace forever, carrying with him the awful burden of the memories of four hundred and seven years of remorseless tyranny.

As he stepped into the waiting barge, he could hear the frantic yells of delighted thousands—for the wreck of the "Maine" was now swathed in a superb American full-sized battle ensign, whose consecrated folds touched the green water lapping against that hideous steel coffin.

And the dead of the "Maine," still prisoned in that

gloomy submerged casket, were at home again. They were in their own country once more. The "Maine" rested on American soil! The martyrs were grandly avenged.

A haggard-eyed young man, in a faded Cuban riding suit, with no mark of rank save his soldierly bearing, silently watched the Fourth Virginia ("Fitz Lee's own") wildly cheering the Star-spangled Banner and the crimson flag and silver castle of the Second Engineers.

When Wheaton (all unconscious of his growing laurels in the far-away Philippines) led the Second Engineers, the First Texas, and the Second Louisiana up the broad causeway in proud review, Andrés Gomez sadly turned away, his heart bursting with grief, as he stood there friendless, penniless; and in all that wilderness of proudly borne flags he saw no Cuban banner borne in honor. He had thrown his young manhood away.

There was no Cuban note in the beautiful, defiant martial music which rent the air—only the familiar notes of the ringing bugles of the color battalion of the Second Engineers, as they carried their United States colors first, before the swarm of golden-sashed generals, for whose fame these sturdy blue ranks had toiled without reward in storm and sunshine, facing fever, death, and privation.

To the general—the star and the golden sash—the brilliant honors of life's luxury-filled evening; to the private soldier there is left the hospital, the soldier's

forgotten grave, and the cold neglect of the community which passes by, in haughty scorn, the humble units which make up the resistless thousands!

“ Verily, I say unto you, he who gathereth the increase is not the one who diggeth the field ! ”

Andrés Gomez had been driven on by some resistless spirit to wander into Havana in search of Padre Mateo Ruiz, the keeper of the secret of Mercedes’s fate.

He was now only a waif of fortune, with merely the bitter memories of the desperate struggle as his barren reward.

With a growing wonder, he marked the stolidity of the easily-recognized Spaniards, and the lazy indifference of the mongrel Cuban crowd. “ The one mourns not, the other cares not to rejoice,” he bitterly murmured, and then the words of his dead brother came back to haunt him. “ Spain has lost Cuba forever—the Cuban cause has been a bootless one—and the American flag will never come down ! ”

The few silver coins in his pocket would only fence off starvation for a few days ; he was a stranger in a city of three hundred thousand without the answering gleam of a pair of friendly eyes. And the spoiler reveled in beautiful Palo Alto, the princely hacienda of his birth, now escheated to the crown.

“ I will seek for news of the Spanish transports. I will try and find some of José’s fellow officers. I will go out to Marianao and try once more for tidings of old Domingo, and then throw myself into the bay from La Punta ; for beg I can not, and, place and fortune are lost to me forever.

"This Cuban revolution is a failure—only a bloody memory now—but for these fighting Yankees the Spaniards would have thrown us all into the sea, in three months more."

He saw how the factions of the leaders had lost their cause, as once before they sold it!

Threading the crowd, he threw himself down on a bench in the park, while the dense throng poured up the Prado to witness the triumphant review of the dozen regiments which had made the formal march into Havana.

There was good reason for the strained calm, the dead tide-water of this passive submission; for a dozen more regiments were massed in readiness without the city's lines, the guns of the forts were all now manned by Yankees, the flower flag gleamed on every keep, and a menacing American squadron lay within rifle shot of the helpless city.

It was an awe-inspiring proof of the concrete power of the long-derided Americans, and the lesson struck home to every quivering heart.

While Andrés dreamily closed his eyes he listened to the babble of two valetudinarians, seated, umbrella in hand, near him. The planter garb of the one, the light, careless city attire of the other, proved the "paisano" and the "ciudano."

"There, you see, Benito," began the townsman, "how our journals and officials lied to us! Our fleet was to ravage the Yankee coasts. It was proved to be not even fit for sea. The Yankees were to be found divided at

home, and their government would have to fight the South, as well as Spain. That was the story!

"I lived twenty years in New Orleans. See the flags of the Southern States waving in yonder procession!

"Alabama and Florida, Georgia and Mississippi, North and South Carolina, proud old Virginia, and, at the head, Texas and Louisiana, with the Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois Engineers! Lies, all lies! Even our spies lied to us and swindled Spain!"

"It is true," growled the planter. "And, the inefficiency at home only matched the corruption here. I know from my dear dead son, who was in the fiscal secrets here, that the officials and importers divided yearly twenty millions of stolen *pésos* in Havana district alone.

"That money would have fortified the island, given us a half million tons of coal, and finished all our strategic railroads."

"It would have been better," mused the townsman, "if either Weyler had been allowed to finish his job of wholesale extermination, or else, Blanco had been permitted to quietly buy outright all the mongrel Cuban leaders.

"They could all have been reached with place or money, except Maceo, and, you know, the other fellows abandoned him to his fate.

"If Blanco had used cash instead of bald talk about autonomy, the insurrection would have dissolved as in seventy-eight—by purchase. America could not then have interfered."

"Perhaps so," placidly answered old Benito; "but, my dear Tomas, remember that the Spanish commanders all sold protection in the outlying districts. They were busied in filling their pockets as the war went on—all of them.

"And, not without a sly, tacit understanding with the so-called Cuban generals.

"I have paid both sides at once to let my plantation alone! I hired two companies of Spanish soldiers, outright, from their colonel, while at the same time my intendant was feeding and supplying the outside insurgent bands.

"I entertained royally every passing set of Spanish officers, and secretly bought cartridges from the underlings of Weyler so that the rebels outside could use the arms they had stripped from our dead. I had to do it, loyal as I was. It was either that, or a choice between a Spanish Mauser ball or a Cuban machete.

"A dozen times I have saved my own hacienda from fire—by promising the insurgent chiefs money. "If you burn it you'll get nothing," I told them, and they saw the point.

"Thank God, it is all over, and the Yankees will forever rule us. Those flags will never come down," he soberly said.

"*Bueno!* They will make all the money they want, and yet, give us a good government. Mark my words: In a year from to-day the rich Yankees will own every thing of value on the island, save our individual lands."

"What are we to do," gasped Tomas.

"We must go to work," calmly replied Benito, "or go to the wall. It is fate! You know the insurrection was a humbug—only a war of organized gold against Spain.

"Our rich classes here—merchants and absentees—all wanted American protection; a stable government; the benefits of a close union; Yankee enterprise, and a fostering of our sugar and tobacco interests.

"In five years, there will be five million cattle in Cuba under Yankee rule. To-day, there are not five hundred thousand."

"You are right," sighed Tomas. "The golden days of *dolce far niente* in Cuba ended with the great Concha and the cutting off of our slave labor. The whole world is an open market now. We must compete to live. And our lifeblood has been long drained by Spanish corruption. I welcome the Yankee rule—for, property will be protected.

"Only an insider, like you or I, can see that the Cuban chiefs were merely a mass of adventurers, living on forced tribute—plunder—the hope of future governmental reward, or the funds doled out by rich schemers like our friend Don Antonio, the Monte Cristo of Paris."

"And," cried Benito, as he lit his cigar and prepared to stroll away, "the hearts of the people have not really been in the rising since '95.

"Gomez, Garcia, and Maceo burned all the interior villages and huts, left the women and children to starve, and then, forced the unwilling men into the Cuban

ranks. Poor devils! They had either to join the bandits or else fall under the Cuban machete. If they refuged with the Spaniard, there was only left to them death by starvation in the reconcentrado lines. Poor Cuba! Land of blood and tears! *Vamonos, amigo!* Let us forget the past. The future must be a paradise compared with the hell we have lived in."

"Of course," murmured Tomas, "and Spain has, at last, paid the penalty of its double-dealing. If, when the fiends blew up the Yankee battleship, the government had promptly avowed it to be the work of crazy brutes, paid for the cruiser, and given over five millions indemnity, the king would not have lost his dominions beyond the sea.

"The Yankees would not have dared to act. The whole world would have been against them!

"If they meant to fight, they should have drawn all our forces in here; let old Grandmother Blanco go into retirement; sent out a real soldier, and rallied every thing around us. But, the regent mother's kitchen cabal dreamed only of foreign aid.

"And, foreign aid has ruined every land that ever trusted to it. We deserve our shame; we have brought about our own humiliation. And there is the cause of it all. That shattered hulk down there—the crime of the century. Spain should have disavowed the act and paid the bill!"

"We are paying, *now!*" groaned Benito, as the two old men sauntered away.

The last words which greeted the astonished revolutionists were Tomas's gloomy predictions:

“In ten years, English, German, and Yankee capital will own the island—from end to end! It is the ‘arrival of the fittest’—not the ‘survival.’”

Andrés Gomez was left almost alone in the sweltering square where the blinding Cuban heat-rays poured down. He mechanically wandered out into the shade, bending his steps to that Visitacion convent which had been Mercedes’s last prison-home—a place of sorrows and deceit.

“If I only dared to try to make a friend of the servants,” he sighed. “But, alas! I am penniless!”

He started in the shady, narrow side-street as a carriage suddenly stopped and a fluttering fan signaled him to approach.

A bitter smile played on his lips as he obeyed the womanly signal.

“The queen and the beggar,” he murmured, as he lifted his sombrero, for, though he could not see the face concealed by a filmy veil, the voice was velvety; there were gems on the silk-enmeshed white hands, and the graceful form told of youth and beauty.

“Colonel Gomez, you are to be my prisoner,” the lady merrily said.

“Alas! madame,” sadly faltered Andrés, “he sleeps in a soldier’s grave at Santiago.”

With a quick movement, the woman dashed her veil aside. She was rarely beautiful, but her witching face had whitened into the pallor of marble.

“And you, my God, you are ——?”

“Andrés Gomez, captain of Cuban irregulars, and—his brother,” solemnly said the astounded wanderer.

The jeweled hands were clasped upon the beauty's bosom.

"*Dios mio!* Now, I know!" she faltered. "Come into my carriage. I must tell you something."

Andrés hesitated for a moment. His shabby exterior brought the blush of shame burning under the bronze of the Cuban sun. But when he saw the woman's blazing eyes, he obeyed her request.

"Drive out on the Vedado road," sharply cried the unknown.

It was when they were beyond all observation, that the stranger ordered a halt.

A score of yards away, down by the seashore, there was a clump of royal palms and a cluster of rocks.

"Follow me!" she cried, leaping out as lightly as a fawn.

"Now, Señor Capitano," frankly began the fair incognita. "I will be brief. I hold your future in my hands. You seek for Mercedes Agramonte, the rich orphan girl, the Cuban spy of La Sevilla. Nay, hear me! Do not give way to anger!

"I found some papers in the hands of Weyler—one of Weyler's staff officers," she hastily cried, "papers that tell the whole story of her deportation. The whole private report is there. You love that girl! She will be rich now—curse on the Yankees who make her so!

"The Church would gladly keep her out of your hands. You know why! I wish to leave Cuba forever.

"I intended to trade on the clergy; but you, señor,

will suit me better. I have a long score to pay off—to the sly old Bishop. You shall have those papers, you shall know all—for ten thousand *pésos duros*—good, clean gold!”

“Alas! I am penniless! A Cuban soldier—a man long robbed of his own,” was Andrés’s reply, as his throbbing brain reeled under this tantalizing disclosure.

“Tell me who you are,” he demanded.

“That you will only know when you have the money ready,” was the crafty woman’s answer. “If you try to follow me to-day, you will never hear of me again. But, for the dead José’s sake,” she faltered, “I would help you. I am desperate, and I must leave Cuba forever.

“I will give you three days! You can see her friends! Come here alone, in three days—come to this very place—the Six Palms—come at noon. You can find out her friends! I dare not; but with the papers once in your hands, you are then the master of the girl’s destiny, and you hold the Church, too, in your power. The papers came from Weyler himself.”

There was the ring of truth in her voice.

“I know you,” cried Andrés, with a sudden intuition. “You are Isabel—the woman whom Weyler worshiped.”

“And, who loved your brother José,” she sobbed.

“They have done with me now! They would chase me from Havana! I fear them—the devils who gathered up all the general’s intrigues. You must have some friends! You must find them!

"Listen: I will send you back to town in my carriage.

"You can easily find out some revolutionists of your own party who are rich—who once knew Elisa Alvarado, her mother. They were all Cubans at heart. Go and seek these friends. Love, future, happiness is before you! Even the rich lawyers would undertake it. Go, or I shall deal with the Church, and bury the girl forever in a convent life. Her fate is in your hands! Mark you! If you even name my name, if you bring a companion here, I will seal my lips. And, young sir, the papers do not come with me. I shall have help at hand. But come back here alone in three days—at noon!" She resolutely walked away.

The bewildered soldier looked back from the carriage to see the resolute adventuress looking out fixedly upon that blue sea beyond whose silver shores lay her freedom. The leaven of fear was working in her darkened soul! It was the time of settlement for past sins!

Andrés aimlessly halted the carriage at the market; under its cool colonnade, he entered a restaurant and bade the "mozo" bring him a cup of coffee.

The carriage had dashed off on its return, before he stepped within the entrance of the famous market restaurant.

Seated there, with his head bowed in his hands, he dreamed desperate dreams of every scheme to obtain help.

"My God, if the Padre were only here," he groaned.

There were curious eyes fixed on the haggard but handsome face of the young insurgent.

Dozens of the guests had seen the departed Colonel José in all his glory of Weyler's staff uniform, and this bronzed wanderer recalled the man of whose death they were ignorant.

The coffee stood long untouched before him as he mused, until, with surprise, he saw beside him, in a shady corner, the two elderly critics of Spain who had babbled in the park. They were evidently rich habitués of the city.

Their repast was almost finished, and Andrés Gomez started from his chair when the old planter solemnly raised his glass, "To the memory of Manuelita Parédes," he sighed. "The Lily of Palo Alto! When she died, the curse came down upon Calixto Gomez. And curses on the man who sold his followers to shame. We are paying for his treason now."

"She was your sister, Benito, was she not?" said the townsman.

"My only sister; the last of our race, for my son died of yellow fever last year. When she was driven out by the Spanish soldiery, the babe at her breast was all she took away, and mother and child are sleeping in the grave.

"I was in Spain when she died; the whole story of the horror came to me later. I never found her grave."

"Señor," gravely said Andrés, as he stood before the old planter, "I can take you to my mother's grave. For if Manuelita Parédes was your sister—she was my mother!"

The planter struggled to his feet.

"You are——" he cried.

"Andrés Parédes Gomez—once captain of the Cuban irregulars—now a homeless wanderer," the young man said. "The Spaniard enjoys my birthright. I have fought in the whole war!"

"Did you not know that the Crown had taken it over, failing heirs, after your father's death in Paris?" said the excited uncle.

"I only know that my brother José, who died on the lines at Santiago, might have some day gained his rights," slowly said Andrés, speaking as if in a dream. "But, I am a rebel—an insurgent captain!"

"Come away with me," cried the old man, opening his arms. "Palo Alto shall be yours yet; it was one of the government sequestrations, but I have 'El Toledo' to give you. If you are Manuelita Parédes's son, you have a home in my heart. How can you prove this?" he cried, with a sudden qualm of doubt.

Old Señor Tomas Cortez hobbled up to them:

"The church registers, of course," he began.

"Yes, yes!" joyously added the overjoyed Benito Parédes.

"God help me!" cried Andrés. "Señores, my last friend on earth was lost when Weyler made away with Padre Mateo Ruiz, the rector of Marianao. He educated me—he knew all—and even the old sacristan Domingo is gone. Padre Ruiz is dead! I have sought him, in vain, for seven long months."

With twinkling eyes, the rich old merchant, Tomas Cortez, called the "mozo" to bring champagne.

"Sit down, *amigos*," he cried, merrily, "I can bring the dead back to life! Mateo Ruiz was my dearest boyhood friend. He is now on the transport 'Catalonia,' coming next week to Matanzas to take away the last Spanish troops. I have a letter from him bidding me come over to Matanzas, when the garrison goes away, to meet him, as he fears Weyler's old accomplices here. The 'Catalonia' is even now on her way!"

"Then, thanks be to God, I am saved!" cried Andrés. "Know me as Andrés Parédes only, for I know my father's shame. It was Padre Ruiz who told me."

"And you shall be my son!" was the old planter's joyous response, as he opened his arms.

The wine flower merrily as the old *hacendero* questioned his nephew.

"Let us go to my house. You are both my guests," was Señor Cortez's device. "This young man needs rest, and, if I must say it—an outfit."

There was no sleep that night for the delighted Benito Parédes, who had found a new joy in his lonely life.

The stars were low in the west when the planter had heard the last of Andrés's long recital.

The happy old man grasped Andrés's hands:

"There are to be no more sorrows," he said. "Rest here; let me be your banker; you are now my son and heir! Tomas Cortez knows Isabel, for he often handled Weyler's secret funds, and the inner life of the great man was an open book to him. She shall have her ten

thousand *pésos*, and I will double it when you bring me face to face with Mercedes. You shall keep your tryst with her. We will turn all over with Cortez to-morrow. He is wise and prudent. I will see him over his morning chocolate. We will waste no time. He knows where she is—he can reach anyone in Havana with his wealth and knowledge. You are to only wait for Padre Ruiz, and then both of you must seek out Mercedes.

“There is only one thing to fear. Not a soul in Cuba must know. You two will travel in different ships, and only meet when landed far away from Cuba.

“If the girl is in France or America, you can find her; if she is in Spain, then I will go over with Ruiz and you can go on to Paris and wait for us there.

“For, I have kept up an open friendship with Spain to save my life and estates. I am not, like you, brave boy, under the ban.”

In a week, the watchful league of Weyler's friends sought for Señorita Isabel in vain. She had vanished from the scenes of her empire over Spain's headsman.

On an arctic morning in Montreal, two men, a month later, faced the bitter February blasts as they toiled along through the snow drifts in a sleigh to the entrance of the Convent of the Sacred Heart.

The old priest, wrapped in swathing furs, was still pondering over the mysterious incarceration of the Cuban heiress in a Canadian convent.

“Here, my beloved son,” he said, “in a land of absolute freedom, under the English flag, Mercedes would be able to leave at any moment.

"This is a land of God's peace; a blessed land; a Catholic land of olden grace."

"You forget, Padre," quickly answered Andrés Gomez, "that the dear girl is ignorant of life. She knows nothing of the power of wealth. She, like me, is penniless. For, the Cuban princess has never come into her own."

"It is a mystery—a mystery," said the priest, "but, *Gracias á Dios*, we will soon know all."

His eyes were fixed upon Andrés, whose face was drawn with the haggard lines of care.

"My God! If they have taken her away!" he faltered.

"Trust to the God who led you out of the hell of Cabañas prison," solemnly said the Padre. "Here we are!" And they entered the portals of the house of peace together.

There was half an hour of intolerable agony as Andrés Gomez paced the floor of the great reception-room.

He well knew that Padre Mateo Ruiz was in official converse with the Lady Superioress.

And the crawling hands of the clock mocked the young lover's beating heart. Would that door never open!

At last, there was the sound of a hand upon the door knob, and as a slight form clad in black glided into the room, Andrés sprang forward.

"Mercedes!" he cried, while the Padre and the Superioress started forward in dread, when the Lady of

La Sevilla gave one glad cry, and sank sobbing upon his breast.

There is no joy that kills, and in a few moments Mercedes Agramonte, with rosy blushes on her pale cheeks, answered her lover's fond demand, "Why did you stay here, mutely?"

"Ah, Andrés," the loyal girl whispered, with tears and smiles, "I swore on the cross to Weyler that I would remain passive here, if he would only spare the Padre's life and honest old Domingo. It was for you, too, for I was promised clemency. They told me that the war would soon be over; that the chiefs would soon submit, and that you, Andrés, should be pardoned."

Her head fluttered down on his bosom as she whispered: "I did it to save your life, for I knew that you would find me out, if you sought the wide world over. They hid me away from the storms of the world here, and, now I know, in the hope to deceive me and blind you. But, these angels here were innocent, and my lips were sealed by my oath."

It was half an hour later, when the lovers separated until the priest could bring the widowed sister of Señor Tomas Cortez to escort the young heiress to New York.

"Old Maria Velasco waits you in the dear old convent at Fort Lee," said the happy priest. "She will go back with us."

"After our marriage, Mercedes, my darling," said Andrés, now the picture of a *caballero* in the light of prosperity shed on him by old Benito Parédes's fatherly bounty.

"Listen, Andrés," whispered Mercedes, "I am a Cuban at heart! You have faced the storm of battle a hundred times for our birthplace. If you want me, as you say your uncle Benito calls for you—" she paused and lifted one rosy finger in her first command—"you will find me waiting for you at the altar of the old church in Marianao.

"There, before that shrine where I have so often knelt and prayed for your life, you will find Mercedes. Let us go back to the land where love joined our hearts, and there let God join our hands."

The soldier lover and the orphaned beauty knelt before the old man, whose trembling hands were raised in a benediction upon them.

When Mercedes shyly gave her lover her blue-veined hand to kiss, at the brief parting, her trembling lips were silent, but there was the promise of an infinite happiness in her wistful, shining eyes. It was the rose of dawn—the dawn of love's golden day!

THE END.

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